

LIGHT AND DIRECTION
JOHN MILTON'S CONCEPTION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
AS DEVELOPED IN HIS WORKS FROM 1624 TO 1640
A CRITICAL STUDY

by
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Thesis
Presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of the
University of Edinburgh
in the
Faculty of Divinity

1962



ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Degree Ph. D.

Date September 22, 1962

Title of Thesis LIGHT AND DIRECTION. JOHN MILTON'S CONCEPTION OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE. A CRITICAL STUDY

This study of Milton's conception of the Christian life is based upon an analysis and interpretation of the works from 1624 to 1640. For the earliest period, major themes are dealt with individually, and the development of these themes is considered chronologically, insofar as this could be determined. Major works are discussed in chronological order. Special attention is given to likely philosophical, theological and (to a lesser extent) literary sources of Milton's thought, and the historical development of some of the most important doctrines is traced. Significant parallels of seventeenth century Puritan thought with that of Milton are noted, and further attention to this matter is given in an appendix. The Christian concept of grace is also reviewed in an appendix. Independent interpretations of the works have been made, but the literature of Milton criticism has been given careful attention and the most important contributions for the purposes of this paper have been noted. Special interpretations of some of the difficult passages in Milton's works are offered.

Milton's earliest interests were in normal relationships that prove epochal for an individual's life. He was caught up by these interests in a kind of loyalty, and he was conscious of being attracted and distracted by them at the same time. His Prolusions indicate a special awareness of error, evil and human corruption in contrast to a truth which is symbolized more than conceptualized in these exercises. There is no integration of outlook in Milton's earliest works, which are premised upon classical conceptions as often as upon Christian ones. But the strength of his loyalties made him conscious that this lack of integration needed to be resolved.

The Nativity Ode expresses the resolution of his many loyalties into a single loyalty to Christ. From this point onward Milton's works indicate that a progressive integration and development of his thought took place. L'Allegro and Il Penseroso show a freedom from constraint and a liberality of outlook such as a steadied faith can result in. The Seventh Prolusion is a major contribution to the interpretation of learning as an art of ordering one's interests and one's life. Milton's own dedication and the care with which he came to make it are expressed in sonnet 7 and a "Letter to a Friend." The early Horton poems affirm the intended harmony which Christ's incarnation and atonement reveal to be the basis of a life of faith. Fidelity to this intended harmony becomes the dominant interest in Milton's subsequent works. A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle offers an interpretation of a life of faith dependent upon the microcosmic-macrocosmic correspondences whose possibilities for

good have been renewed. Fidelity to the intended harmony and to the heavenly power that makes it possible is the subject of this poem. It presents the individual in his life of faith finding the necessary resources to affirm the good within himself and all creation when an intruding power confronts him with strong temptations to succumb to faithlessness. Lycidas presents the individual dedicated to upholding and fostering the intended harmony confronted by the final threat of chaos, death, and overcoming it by faith. The Epitaphium Damonis affirms that such faith is strong enough to cope with grief and to rely upon the power of heaven to support eternally the human love which constitutes the highest form of intended harmony which men can share.

In these works Milton develops a conception of a structured faith, consistently Protestant, in which a doctrine of intended harmony supplants the Catholic concept of natural law and offers a means of structuring and ordering life by means of grace in a more thoroughgoing way than other Protestant thinkers appear to have done.

Many other circumstances also I could have mentioned, but this, to such as have the worth in them to make trial, for light and direction may be enough.

from Of Education

O flours,
That never will in other Climate grow,
My early visitation, and my last
At Eve'n,

...

how shall we breath in other Aire
Less pure, accustomd to immortal Fruits?

Eve, in Paradise Lost, Book XI

So many grateful Altars I would reare
Of grassie Terfe, and pile up every Stone
Of lustre from the brook, in memorie,
Or monument to Ages,

...

In yonder nether World where shall I seek
His bright appearances, or foot step trace?

Adam, in Paradise Lost, Book XI

Preface

The subject of this paper was proposed to me by the late John Baillie. Later it was E. M. W. Tillyard's counsel that Milton's early thought requires more attention than it has been given. I am also indebted to Charles S. Duthie for his continuous support and encouragement. About all that I brought to this work was a desire to study Milton's thought more carefully and some preparation to do so. I have taken from it personally much more.

Except in a few instances, Merritt Hughes' edition of the poems has been used. Prose quotations and translations are generally from the Columbia edition. However, English translations of most of the earlier Prologues are those of Phyllis B. Tillyard, whose renderings are less literal but more fluent. The Columbia edition has been consulted to determine significant variations in the text of both Latin and English works. Of the annotated editions used, those of Todd and Hawkins remain the most serviceable. Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version except as noted.

For the most part, "The MLA Style Sheet" (rev. ed., 1961), compiled by William Riley Parker, has been the guide in matters of style. In an effort to make the paper more readable, however, a method of citing references has been adapted from a practice common in scientific literature.

Readers are asked to use the Bibliography, since references have been abbreviated as much as could be made consistent with clarity. Where only one entry under one author is given in the Bibliography, the author's name is usually considered to suffice, followed by the page reference. In other instances, some identifying abbreviation of the title has been given.

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CHAPTER ONE

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS: THE EARLIEST WORKS

If Milton had ceased writing at the age of thirty-two, he would have left us a substantial body of poetry, comprising nearly all of his verse but three long poems. We would still have known the virtue-loving Milton, but our imaginations might have been more fired and less awed by the spectacle of his work than they often have been. We would not have heard the "organ-voice of England," but we would have known a man of kindling inspiration. We would have been more likely to let the early poems speak to us out of their own voice and mood, and to let them move us by their own rhythms and melodies. Some have shown that this can still be done, and I take it as an axiom not always followed that it is wiser to read forward from a poet's early works to his latest productions than to read the poems of his first period under the silent shadow of creations yet unknown to himself. To read forward in this way from first things to last can also lead us to a fresher reading of the later poems.¹

Several of the earliest works help us understand the direction that Milton's deepest interests took. They also

¹"Yes, a principle too often forgotten," was Dr. Tillyard's notation on the above observations. Cf. James Holly Hanford, "The Youth of Milton," Studies in Shakespeare, Milton, and Donne (1925), 163.

reveal to us the problems Milton first confronted seriously and the kind of solutions that satisfied his mind. Most of all, perhaps, these first works show us what delighted him.

It is striking that Milton's first two poetic efforts--a paraphrase of Psalm 114 and a translation of Psalm 136, "done by the Author at fifteen years old" (1624)²--convey so much of his own passionate interests and abiding attitude toward the world, as he came to express these in subsequent works.

When the blest seed of Terah's faithful Son,
After long toil their liberty had won,
And past from Pharian Fields to Canaan Land,
Led by the strength of the Almighties hand,
Jehovah's wonders were in Israel shown,
His praise and glory was in Israel known.

(Paraphrase, 1-6)

The "blest see," the "faithful Son," the liberty won after long toil, the "strength of the Almighty's hand" leading, the "wonders...shown" and the "praise and glory...known"--these are already characteristically Miltonic interpretations wrought from a much more succinct original. And the sense of joy in the Lord that pervades Milton's familiar translation of Psalm 136--this was enduringly Miltonic too:

²The studies in the chronology of Milton's poems, especially those of Parker and of Woodhouse, have been reviewed, as well as the conclusions (often based on the research of these two men) of French, Hughes and Hanford (see Bibliography). Hughes's editions of the Minor Poems are attempts to arrange them chronologically. For the purpose of this study perhaps only two sets of dates that have not been agreed upon are critical: that of the Elegia Septima and the Italian poems. For the most part I am interested in the early treatment of themes rather than in an item by item chronology. However, I have been as accurate as the research of others and my own judgement have made possible.

Let us with a gladsom mind
 Praise the Lord, for he is kind
 For his mercies ay endure,
 Ever faithfull, ever sure. (1-4)

Certainly what first strikes the eye and ear in the earliest poems is the joyful contentment that breathes through them. They are a delight to dwell with. They are pervaded by a spirit of openness--ingenuousness is not too strong a word--which the extent of Milton's learning should not hide from us. As early as the Carmina Elegiaca (1624 or 1625)³ Milton was moved to say:

Surge, age surge, leves, iam convenit, excute somnos,
 Lux oritur, tepidi fulcra relinque tori
 Iam canit excubitor gallus praemuncius ales
 Solis et invigilans ad sua quemque vocat

 Ecce novo campos zephyritis gramine vestit
 Fertilis, et vitreo rore madescit humus

Arise, come arise; now it is time, put an end to easy slumbers. The light is born, leave the foot of the languid couch. Now crows the sentinel bird, the cock, herald of the sun, and wakeful calls each man to his business.

.....
 Behold, the fertile zephyr-born [goddess] clothes the fields with new grass, and the ground grows wet with sparkling dew. (1-4, 11-12)

Already Milton was insisting that a person should awake to his work in a spirit of wonder and joy.

Milton was concerned in his early works with beginnings and endings, as youth usually is in its first flowering. The subjects of the early poems cluster like ripening grapes on

³See J. Milton French, ed., The Life Records of John Milton (1949-1958), V:370-371. (This work will be abbreviated LR in future references). Harris F. Fletcher, The Intellectual Development of John Milton (1956-1961), I:211, suggests an earlier date from Milton's grammar school period.

the vine of life at its bud-points: birth and death, nature, spring and love, innocence and corruption, friendship and eremity, religion and antiquity, truth and error, and art and learning as aids to man's response to life--these were the subjects that quickened Milton's youthful consciousness and made the present time eventful to him. Poems like the early Elegia Prima (1626), written to his close friend, Charles Diodati, give us perhaps an even surer index of Milton's preferences and of the way his mind reached out to touch the world than the delightful fancies of the somewhat later L'Allegro and Il Penseroso do.

Et totum rapiunt me mea vita libri.

and my books--my true life--sweep me off with
them, mastering me utterly. (26)

This phrase, "et totum rapiunt me," is one we should remember whenever we think of Milton's mind at work. What he sought from whatever his attention turned to was direction, vitality, power for living. Hazlitt understood Milton when he wrote that "to be a pedant is to see neither the beauties of nature nor of art. Milton saw both...."⁴ He read and he observed in the same way, in order that his senses and his spirit together might come to life awakened and prepared to see, and that he might respond perceptively. The early Prolusion, Mane citus lectum fuge, discovered with his Commonplace Book,⁵ indicates

⁴ Lectures on the English Poets (1841), 328.

⁵ See the Columbia edition of The Works of John Milton (1931-1940), XII:288-291 & 390-391. This work will be abbreviated CE in future references.

the close alliance which Milton made at an early age between the observations of the senses and the judgments of the mind.

Oculos delectare cupis? aspice solem purpureo robore orientem, caelum purum, et salubre, herbescentem agrorum viriditatem, florum omnium varietatem. Aures iuvare velis? audi argutos auvium concentus et leves apum susurros: naribus placebis? non satiari possis suavitatem odorum qui e floribus efflantur. Quod si haec non arrident, rationem salutis tuae aliquantulum quaeso ducas; quippe summo mane cubitu surgere ad firmam corporis valetudinem non parum conducit studiis vero aptissimum est tunc enim in numerato habes ingenium. Praeterea boni regis est non somno immodico corpus saginare et vitam feriatam et laboris vacuum transigere, reipublicae cum nocte tum die consulere ut argute hortatur Theocritus....

Would you delight your eyes? Look at the sun rising in ruddy vigor, the pure and healthful sky, the flourishing green of the fields, the variety of all the flowers. Would you delight your ears? Listen to the clear concert of the birds and the light humming of the bees. Would you please your nostrils? You cannot have enough of the sweetness of the scents that breathe from the flowers. But if this please you not, I beg you to consider a little the argument of your health; for to rise from bed at early morn is in no slight degree conducive to a strong constitution; it is in fact best for study, for then "you have wit in readiness." Besides, it is the part of a good king not to pamper his body with too much sleep, and live a life all holidays and free from toil, but to plan for the commonwealth night and day, as Theocritus wisely urges.... (CE XII:288-289)

Milton was demonstrably caught up here by the need to see nature with delight and to order life with strength.

It is no accident that drama proved a fond diversion for him. One can visualize him straining with the playwright to make life cohere. He understood what tragedy is for:

Et dolet, & specto, juvat & spectasse dolendo,
Interdum & lacrymis dulcis amaror inest:

It pains me, and yet I look, and find pleasure in looking though it pains me. Sometimes there is a sweet bitterness in the tears I shed....

(Elegia Prima, 39-40)

Of course Milton visited the elm groves on the city's edge. And of course he saw there, "blandas spirantia sidera flammæ," "like stars that breathe out soft flames," the groups of maidens go dancing past. What he read and what he saw on the stage drew him to look for loveliness in life, and like most young men, he found his gaze not unrewarded by what his eyes beheld. "Rapiunt me," he said of his books, and it was the same healthy rapture that he hoped to be caught up by in life. There was April more than August in the strongest influences the youthful Milton felt.

Nevertheless, he felt the double impact that the beautiful can make. He knew that the tension between high aspiration and mere desire was unresolved, and he was content for a while to draw back from influences that still dismayed his spirit too much to control. Probably Milton was not yet conscious of how pervasive this double impact of the world can be. Probably he did not yet see that wherever a person touches the world, in thought or act, he is attracted and distracted all at once.

Nor does Milton yet seem conscious that books can have a double effect upon men's spirits too. The Elegia Prima shows that Milton is steeped in an almost voluptuous love of antiquity. One is not always sure whether he possesses or is possessed. There is no question, however, of his ability to make antique traditions live. Even at the beginning of Milton's efforts, Hazlitt's observation applies:

"Milton's learning has all the effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature."⁶ Again, it is his capacity to be caught up by whatever his attention turns to earnestly that makes the past so much alive to Milton's imagination. He already does what he later urges others to do in the Seventh Prolusion, where he writes concerning the power of learning and the response men ought to make to it:

hoc est, Auditores, omni aetati quasi vivus interesse,
& velut ipsius temporis nasci contemporaneus;

This means, my hearers, to reside in every age as if alive, to be born as though a contemporary of time itself. (CE XII:266-267)

Milton was soon to look hard at the hold that nature and antiquity can have upon us, and in On the Morning of Christ's Nativity he was to voice a reconciliation of heavenly and earthly influences that deeply satisfied him. And just as the sequence, On Time, Upon the Circumcision, and At a Solemn Music were to express his understanding of man's state and destiny, amid so much that must be called corrupt, so in a few years he was to penetrate into the mystery of human innocence and heavenly grace in A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle. In the meantime he continued to explore the beginnings and the endings of man's life. He continued to reach out in many directions, as a young man's deeper interests should, for the world at its loveliest, and man at his best. Everywhere in

⁶Lectures, p. 112.

these early works there is freshness and sensitivity of spirit, and responsiveness of mind and heart--a gentle yearning and a gratified stirring toward deeper dimensions that, wherever he turns, life gives hints of holding in patient readiness for him to come upon.

It may be useful to observe here that when convictions first are taking shape a dynamic ethic does not rest upon a clear philosophy or theology. At such a time of first encounters and discoverings, the mind holds certain ideal aims and axioms from which it gains certain imprecise intuitions of the truth and a certain feel for how to pursue the search for truth. It is only later that a clear philosophy and theology ever come to be worked out.

So the young Milton was currently engrossed in trying out his initial premises on life, and doing what must be done to make the world's life and the mind's life square. He knew the usual difficulties of youth in reconciling the world that he encountered with the hopes and aspirations that he held, and he took some of youth's short-cuts to the solution of the questions that life raised.

Death, that seems to put an end to every beginning that life can make, raised a question mark which Milton sought to find an answer to repeatedly throughout his life. Each time he spoke out with what amounted to shifting confidence, as his own views matured. The early date at which Milton came to face

the fact of death with genuine feeling and unflinching attention was remarkable. The Elegia Secunda (1626)⁷ already is controlled in tone. The poem, however, is developed in classical, not Christian terms. The Beadle, he says, was worthy of a goddess' intervention; his dirge is sung because she did not intervene.

Dignus quem Stygiis medica revocaret ab undis
Arte Coronides, saepe rogante dea.

.....

Vestibus hunc igitur pullis Academia luge,
Et madeant lachrymis nigra feretra tuis.
Fundat & ipsa modos querebunda Elegeia tristes,
Personet & totis naenia moesta scholis.

...worthy to be recalled from the waves of Styx
itself by Coronis' son, through his skill as
healer, at the oft-repeated prayer of the goddess.

.....

Mourn therefore this man, Academe; robed in dark-
hued vestments mourn for him, and let his black
bier be drenched with your tears. Let plaintive
Elegy, herself, pour forth sorrow-stricken strains,
and let the mournful chant ring and ring all
through our Schools. (9-10, 21-24)

The thought is modest, the conceit simple, and the poem succeeds because the poet keeps within the limits that his feelings and his insights tell him to.

But it is with the Elegia Tertia⁸ that Milton finds the

⁷Richard Ridding, Beadle of Cambridge, died about October, 1626. See LR I:121. Milton dates the poem "Anno aetatis 17."

⁸Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester, died on September 26, 1626. See LR I:120. Milton dates the poem "Anno aetatis 17." Milton numbers it Tertia and it follows the Elegia Secunda in the 1645 edition. It appears right that it should follow.

voice a man must have when faced with death.

Moestus eram, & tacitus nullo comitante sedebam,

Sorrow-stricken was I; I was sitting, voiceless,
with no comrade by my side.... (1)

Here is a voice that knows it has a human body. Its possessor is led naturally to a vision of death's power and to the remembrance of heroic men. In this poem Milton's sensibilities are all controlled, he is content to portray no more than the comforts sorrow finds, and he is very clear in pointing out that his heavenly vision is no more than a much to be desired dream, banished with the night. This short work is a modest, tremulous and touching expression of yearning for the comfort heaven can give to earth-bound men whose spirits are troubled by death.

It was also in his treatment of death in the Elegia Tertia that Milton demonstrated his great power to depict heaven in earthly images. This unceasing comparison of earth and heaven, by which he came to make thought tangible, is one of the most striking characteristics of his poems and one of his most successful aids to thought. Here he pictures the Bishop, sainted in heaven, advancing to receive the greetings of the heavenly company.

Dumque senex tali incedit venerandus amictu,
Intremuit laeto florea terra sono.

While the aged [Bishop] moved onward, a reverend figure, so gloriously robed, the flower-strewn earth was all aquiver with joyous sounds; (57-58)

The scene is bright and dear, and compact with the distillate that only earth can yield to such imagining.

In the Latin poem, In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis, apparently written a few months after Elegia Tertia,⁹ Milton returns to the question of what happens to men after they have died. Now the grief is consciously overdrawn, so that the willful power of the gods can be denied supremacy.

At ecce diras ipse dum fundo graves,
Et imprecor neci necem,
Audisse tales videor attonitus sonos
Leni, sub aura, flamine:
Caecos furores pone, pone vitream
Bilemque & irritas minas,
Quid temere violas non nocenda numina,
Subitoque ad iras percita.
Non est, ut arbitraris elusus miser,
Mors atra Noctis filia,
Erebove patre creta, sive Erinnye,
Vastove nata sub Chao:
Ast illa caelo missa stellato, Dei
Messas Ubique colligit;

But see! while I was pouring forth, myself, weighty
curses, and praying death on the head of Death,
methought I heard, in deep amazement, such sounds
as these, borne by a gentle breath, 'neath the
gale: "Fling off your blind frenzies: fling off
your gleaming bile, and your vain threats. Why
do you blindly essay to outrage powers divine
no man should injure, powers stirred of a sudden
to wild bursts of rage? Death is not, as you,
poor, deluded mortal, fancy, the swarthy daughter
of Night, nor was she born of Erebus as sire,
or of Erinys as mother within illimitable chaos.
Rather does she, despatched from the starry skies,
everywhere gather the harvests of God.... (23-36)

Here Milton is in control of his thoughts, as his intricately rich depiction of the heavenly vision also demonstrates, but his thoughts are still moving toward maturity. Milton is aware that this is so, and does not force himself beyond heaven's portals. So in the dream, the Bishop of Ely speaks:

⁹Early 1627. Nicholas Felton, Bishop of Ely, died on October 6, 1626. Milton dates the poem "Anno aetatis 17," but in it refers to the Elegia Tertia as already written.

Sed hic tacebo, nam quis effari queat
 Oriundus humano patre
 Amoenitates illius loci, mihi
 Sat est in aeternum frui.

"But here I will hold my peace, for who, if born of human sire, would have the strength to set forth in full the loveliness of that place? I count it enough to enjoy that place forever."

(65-68)

Milton knew that more than curiosity must move a man to speak of heaven, and he knew that the vision he aspired to was not yet his own. The thought of the poem, very lucid in its intricacy, is more Greek than Christian. Death is God's harvester, who:

Animasque mole carnea reconditas
 In lucem & auras evocat:

...souls hidden under a mass of flesh she calls
 out into the light, and into the air.... (37-38)

There is nothing in the desire to ascend to heaven that cannot be construed as Christian, with parallels from the Biblical II Kings and occasional comments of St. Paul. But the poem is instinct with the spirit of relieved escape, which is not Christian, rather than with the spirit of overcoming that typifies the Christian attitude toward death. Up to now Milton was still giving in somewhat to the thought adhering to the ancient forms he loved to use, Greek thought, in which Plato's influence was predominant but not exclusive.

It was by continuing to confront this fact of death that Milton gradually came to a profounder understanding of both earth's and heaven's realities. The first occasion that he wrote about the death of someone fairly close to him was in the poem, On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough.

If our chronology is right, this poem was written a year after the poem on the Bishop of Ely's death.¹⁰ The English poem appears to raise questions about death more seriously than the earlier ones. In the Ely poem there was cursing but no questioning. But now Milton asks if it would not have been better for his little niece to have remained on earth to bless it with her purity. In spite of several fine lines and the evidence of poetic talent at work throughout the poem, it is an immature work. The thought and the poetic conceits used to express it are both overwrought, probably because the poet's feelings were that way as well. "O fairest flower no sooner blown but blasted," the poem begins, and the bare fact of death's untimeliness was to continue to trouble Milton for many years to come. He had reason to be troubled here, for perhaps no poem proved so much "above the yeers he had, when he wrote it" as this one on his infant niece's death. It cautions us to keep in mind that Milton could make mistakes of judgement just like everyone else. Here thought and form concur unhappily: the images, the metaphors, the comparisons of the infant child with figures from antiquity are outlandish, the references to the child's death lack the power to convey what such a death must be, and the thoughts expressed are facile and almost crude.

The whole poem is premised on the unexamined belief that

...something in thy face did shine
Above mortalitie that shew'd thou wast divine.

¹⁰It is with reluctance that I accept the date of 1628 for this poem when both Milton and Edward Phillips date it in his 17th year. But the facts on which Parker bases his conclusion leave little room for doubt. What appears to have happened is that by 1673 Milton mistook the birth date for the date of death.

Not only is Milton not troubled here by this deification of human nature: he luxuriates in it. He speculates at length on just what divine form the child might truly have, and unnervingly questions why she could not stay on earth "To slake his wrath whom sin hath made our foe/...To stand 'twixt us and our deserved smart". This is an office that maturer minds consent to leave to Christ. The poem exhibits a genuine desire to deal with death seriously but apart from a facility for words it exhibits little more. It is no wonder that Milton returned more than once to this same theme.¹¹

It would appear that in striving to circumvent the fact of death, Milton acquiesced too readily in a conception of man's innate sublimity that was less than factual. In many of the early poems Milton is too generous toward man. He is not yet aware of the proportions that evil can assume in human nature or of how much the spirit is affected by this evil too. Consequently he does not present man as quite the kind of creature one must deal with in one's neighbor or oneself. He makes man a little more, and therefore a little less, than real to us.

11

Not everyone finds this poem to be strident as I do. Among those who deal generously with it are Hanford (Handbook, 139) and Allen(47-52). Brooks and Hardy (241-243) speak of its poetic defects and Daiches (21-25), while trying to be kind, is candid about the deficiencies of its images and conceits. MacLean (299 & 305) cogently suggests that in this poem Milton struggles to fuse "poetical power and religious experience" and that with regard to imagery, pattern and theme necessary to combine these interests, Milton is "becoming aware of their possibilities" but was to succeed in unifying his interests only later. The poem exposes in an acute form the dichotomy of compelling interests in temporal and eternal realities. It does nothing to resolve the problem; on the contrary, it is fraught with confusion in the face of these divided interests.

The difficulty can be quickly diagnosed. The infant niece was treated as divine; Winchester was referred to as "semideamque animam," a spirit that is half-divine; Ely was portrayed as a homeward soaring spirit masterfully unterrified by the wonders that he passed; for the youthful Milton, man has too much of divinity in him. The presence of evil in the soul, the evidence that a usurping lord enthralls man's life, will cause no grievous consternation in someone who believes that man is much of a god already in himself. Man is not man, nor is God wholly God in such a reckoning.

But Milton's mind was growing very quickly and it would be easy to fail to keep pace with him. Imperfect thought is not the same as thoughtlessness. Milton's thoughts on death never lacked for charity and a realistic acceptance of the fact itself. It is not possible to equate the development of Milton's thoughts on death simply with a probable chronology. The process by which understanding comes about is usually too complex to trace in a simple chronological way. Already in the poem In obitum Procancellarii medici (1626),¹² Milton made the unflinching assertion that it simply is man's present destiny to die.

Parere fati discite legibus,
Manusque Parcae jam date supplices,
Qui pendulum telluris orbem
Iapeti colitis nepotes.

.....

Per tenebras Stygis ire certum est.

Learn obedience to the laws of destiny and lift
suppliant hands to the Goddess of Fate, you des-

¹²John Gostlin, the Vice-Chancellor, died on October 21, 1626. The facts require a date of late 1626, although Milton dates the poem "Anno aetatis 16." See LR I:121.

cendants of Iapetus who inhabit the pendulous orb of the earth.... The journey through the shadows of the Styx is inevitable.

(1-4, 8. Hughes trans.)

Milton saw that the fact of death gives men a special reason to be kind. In the face of it, he was very quick to lay hold of gentleness, as the affecting close of this poem makes clear.

Colende praeses, membra precor tua
Molli quiescant cespite, & ex tuo
Crescant rosae, calthaeque busto,
Purpureoque hyacinthus ore.
Sit mite de te iudicium Aeaci,
Subrideatque Aetnaea Proserpina,
Interque felices perennis
Elysio spatiere campo.

Master, worthy to be cherished, may your limbs,
I pray, rest quiet 'neath the soft turf, and from
the place of your burial may roses grow, and mari-
golds, and the crimson-faced hyacinth. Mild be
Aeacus's judgment on you, and may Aetnaean Proser-
pina smile upon you; may you stroll in endless life
amid the blessed in the Elysian plains. (41-48)

Of course Milton was thinking of many things other than death during these early years, and the Nativity Ode, which will be seen to have been so pivotal for him, was to intervene before he put in writing further thoughts on death. It is clear, however, that the subject of death already deeply stirred him; what the Nativity Ode was to provide was a Christian sense of victory. After that, Milton's views on death moved from one degree of wholeness to another.

He was only twenty-three when he was able to treat the subject of death with the gentle radiance and realism of the tradition which Ben Jonson led. This is a tradition full of wisdom and wit, gentle, compassionate and winning, and nearly always Christian in its premises. Milton's two poems on the

death of the university carrier and An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester belong to this tradition.¹³

They form a striking contrast to Milton's earlier treatment of death. They represent a drawing back by Milton to the near side of reality, a humanizing of his attitude toward death that only the quiet contentment of true faith provides. Like almost all such poems in this tradition, they rest on the conviction that God takes care of Christians who have died, so that what remains for us to do is just to celebrate in simple phrases their humanity.

I cannot agree with those who find the Hobson poems cumbersome. They are instinct with the faith that God still cares, that for God Hobson is irreplaceable and irreducible to dust; so that those who knew him can take delight in what his human nature was like, knowing that God still takes delight in this man too.¹⁴

If any ask for him, it shall be sed,
Hobson has supt, and's newly gon to bed. (17-18)

An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester represents the Cavalier tradition at its finest. Death is confronted as death here, sorrow is permitted to be sorrow, and the suffering

¹³ Hanford wrote that the Marchioness poem "carries with it the pure and classic style of the Jonsonian lyric" ("Youth", 123). So do the Hobson poems, if pleasantly less pure. Thomas Hobson died on January 1, 1631. Jane Savage, Marchioness of Winchester, died in April, 1631. The accepted date for the poems is 1631.

¹⁴ The third Hobson poem, Hobson's Epitaph, found by W. R. Parker in a 1640 volume, is written in the same style as Milton's two published Hobson poems. The pungency of the humor is so similar to that of the other two and the Christian confidence so deftly expressed in common with the two published poems that the work appears in all probability to be Milton's.

that preceded this young mother's death is dealt with honestly. All the effort of the poem and all the poet's art is put into the service of mitigating the sorrow over her death by expressing with gentle persuasiveness the conviction that her life was good and happy to think back upon, and that she is blessed now with God's felicity.

Gentle Lady may thy grave
Peace and quiet ever have;
After this thy travel sore
Sweet rest cease thee evermore,
.....
Here, besides the sorrowing
That thy noble House doth bring,
Here be tears of perfect moan
Wept for thee in Helicon,
And som Flowers, and some Bays,
For thy Hears to strew the ways,
Sent thee from the banks of Came,
Devoted to thy vertuous name;
Whilst thou bright Saint high sit'st in glory,
Next her much like to thee in story,...

(47-50, 53-62)

The poem is one of Milton's loveliest and represents a triumph of humanity in him. In treating the subject of death from this time on, Milton was master of both his thought and artistry. It was as though he had reached a clear-eyed faith and went on to explore both earth and heaven with this faith as his pole-star all the way.

But many attractions were to be assimilated and many perplexities encountered before this early resolution would take place. For one thing, nature continually appealed to him and led on to the impulses of love that beauty's charms inspired. Nature, for Milton, is fraught with an attractive power, and he sings of her voluptuous vitality most memorably in the Elegia Quinta, In Adventum Veris. There is nothing

repressive about his spirit here--he abandons himself with surprising candor to the task of tracing the fertility of nature's ways. Just as the First Prolusion describes the joys of nature, the Elegia Quinta embraces them.

In the First Prolusion,¹⁵ where Milton contrasts day with night, he does not altogether forget to mention the blessings that day brings, but the chief contrast that he makes is simply that of death with life.

Vos igitur, Auditores, posteaquam Nox nihil
aliud sit quam obitus, & quasi mors Diei, nolite
committere ut Mors Vitae praeponatur;

I beg you then, my hearers, since Night is but the
passing and the death of Day, not to give Death
the preference over Life,... (P.B.Tillyard trans.)

Thus it is the sheer capacity of day to waken life that he first celebrates.

Et certe primo quam omnium animantium stirpi grata
sit & desiderabilis, quid operae est vobis ex-
ponere; cum vel ipsae volucres nequeant suum celare
gaudium, quin egressae nidulis, ubi primum dilucu-
lavit, aut in verticibus Arborum concentu suavissimo
deliniant omnia, aut sursum librantes se, & quam
possunt prope Solem volitent, redeunti gratulaturae
luci.

In the first place, there is assuredly no need to
describe to you how welcome and how desirable
Day is to every living thing. Even the birds
cannot hide their delight, but leave their nests
at peep of dawn and noise it abroad from the tree-
tops in sweetest song, or darting upwards as near
as they may to the sun, take their flight to wel-
come the returning day. (Tillyard trans.)

The entire passage (CE XII:136-141) consists of a rising

¹⁵The First Prolusion is commonly dated 1628. (LR I:148). But Woodhouse dates it early in 1627. Aside from the fact that dating all the Prolusions from 1628 onward bunches their delivery unnecessarily close together, Milton's lengthy introductory remarks on the animosity of his listeners makes it very

crescendo of natural voluptuousness, compellingly set forth.

But this is only a restrained prelude to the unbridled desires of nature that burst forth upon the earth, "vere tepente, novos," "now, in the growing warmth of the spring," which Milton portrays in the Elegia Quinta.¹⁶

Exuit invisam Tellus rediviva senectam
Et cupit amplexus, Phoebe, subire tuos.
Et cupit, et digna est; quid enim formosius illa,
Pandit ut omniferos luxuriosa sinus,
Atque Arabum spirat messes, et ab ore venusto
Mitia cum Paphiis fundit amoma rosis?
.....
Sic Tellus lasciva suos suspirat amores;
Matris in exemplum caetera turba ruunt.

The reviving earth throws off her hated old age and craves thy embraces, O Phoebus. She craves them and she is worthy of them; for what is lovelier than she as she voluptuously bares her fertile breast and breathes the perfume of Arabian harvests and pours sweet spices and the scent of Paphian roses from her lovely lips?

.....
Thus the wanton earth breathes out her passion, and her thronging children follow hard after her example. (55-60, 95-96. Tillyard trans.)

It is true that "Marmoreas iuvenes clamant Hymenaeae per urbes;" "Through marble cities the youths are chanting Hymenaeae;" and that the young virgins go forth into the spring

likely that this composition dates from his first two years of residence at Cambridge (1625-1627), when such feelings are believed to have been most strongly held toward him by his fellow students.

It seems possible to me that the composition may have been written in the spring of 1626. The Greek letter to Milton from Charles Diodati, usually dated in the spring of 1626, would have challenged Milton at a sensitive point and provided just the kind of spur he needed to treat the theme of the First Prolusion in the way he did. The letter and Diodati's possible influence will be discussed.

¹⁶Milton dates this poem "Anno aetatis 20." This could mean 1628 or 1629. I believe that 1629 (spring) is likely.

with prayer and therefore, presumably, with chaste desire.

But nature and the gods have no such reticence.

Nunc etenim toto currit vagus orbe Cupido,
Languentesque fovet solis ab igne faces.

.....
Per sata luxuriat fruticetaque Maenalius Pan;
Vix Cybele mater, vix sibi tuta Ceres;

Now wandering Cupid runs at large throughout the
whole world and kindles his dying torch in the
flame of the sun.

.....
Maenalian Pan takes his wanton pleasure in the
sown fields and the corpses; (there) mother
Cybele is hardly safe from him and Ceres herself
is hardly safe. (97-98, 125-26)

Milton all but seems to be confronting a fact too big for him.

He will return to it, well-armed, when he writes A Mask
Presented at Ludlow Castle. Now, at the age of twenty, it
is all he can do to accommodate his human nature to the
nature that he finds. That accommodation is the subject of
some subsequent poems.

To be just, however, we must observe two points quite
clearly. First, in the Elegia Quinta, Milton has allowed
his fancy quite a flight, and he is not unconscious that he
has taken liberties with the raw facts of nature's life.
The last six lines of the poem remind us of the bare facts
we really face as men. "Te referant miseris te, Iupiter,
aurea terris Saecla," "Let the Age of Gold restore you,
Jupiter, to a wretched world." (135-136) Milton goes on to
remind us that the world is soberer than we sometimes like to
imagine it to be, that spring is fleeting, and that nothing
on earth can hold back time's chariot or winter's cold.
Indeed, this fact is the dramatic justification for the

poem's design, although Milton has failed to give the necessary foreshadowing of its significance earlier.

Since Milton ends by being soberer than some parts of the poem might have led us to expect, there is a second point concerning the poem that should be noted. The poem is remarkable for its success in depicting a pure responsiveness to nature's joys, unencumbered by the intrusion of religion or morality. I do not mean by this that Milton was not stirred deeply by the problem of nature's power. He reveals as much.

Concitaque arcano fervent mihi pectora motu,
Et furor, et sonitus me sacer intus agit.

My breast is aflame with the excitement of its
mysterious impulse and I am driven on by the
madness and the divine sounds within me. (11-12)

But he knows where he is, and what he is about to do.

Quid parit haec rabies, quid sacer iste furor?
Ver mihi, quod dedit ingenium, cantabitur illo;

What is to be the offspring of this madness and
this sacred ecstasy? The spring shall be the song
of the inspiration that it has given to me.... (22-23)

Milton then proceeds to reveal in the poem his great capacity for what we usually think of as the dramatists skill--the capacity to go out to what he saw and participate imaginatively in its essence without thwarting comprehension by bringing his personal judgments to bear too soon upon the subject that approaches him. Again, it is his ability to be caught up that carries him into such experiences. His continual fair-mindedness in picturing alien powers stems from this capacity to see them as they are, to the fullest extent that imagination can make clear. He has a great sense of the realities and he came very early to realize that if he was

ever to see life whole he must be willing to see into the dangers and temptations life confronts men with, as well as into life's sublimities.

The influence of the buoyantly youthful Charles Diodati upon Milton must have been considerable and is nowhere more likely than in Milton's early attitude toward nature and love. There is every reason to believe that Diodati was Milton's closest friend, judging from the extant correspondence between them and Milton's other references to him. Diodati was at Cambridge until 1626, and he and Milton continued to see one another and correspond (infrequently) until Diodati's death in August, 1638. We know from the Elegia Sexta that Milton came to distinguish carefully between Diodati's Bacchic inspiration and his own, even though there is remarkable freedom from any disapproval in the poem. Earlier, however, the evidence suggests that Diodati's influence was strong. He probably gave Milton the foil he needed to fence with the impulses of youth. Certainly Diodati's own cheerfulness was infectious and he was quick to prompt Milton to make such cheerfulness his own. Diodati's letter to Milton, written in Greek and usually dated 1625, expresses genuine delight over their expected meeting the next day and bids Milton to

be of good cheer, my friend, and hold fast to what we planned together, and adopt a holiday frame of mind, and gayer than that of today. For all will be fair tomorrow: and the air, and the sun, and the river, and trees, and birds, and earth, and men will laugh and dance together with us, as we make holiday, let this last be said without arrogance. (CE XII:293, Eng. trans.)

The last sentence quoted could be a summary statement of what

Milton sought to give voice to in his Elegia Quinta.

Diodati's next extant letter to Milton, also in Greek, is usually dated 1626. It challenges Milton to respond to nature and nature's gifts to youth.

But you, extraordinary man, why do you despise the gifts of nature? Why inexcusably persist in hanging over books and studies all day and all night? Live, laugh make the most of youth and the hours; and cease studying the zeals and recreations and indolences of the wise men of old, wearing yourself out the while. I, in all things else inferior to you, in this one thing, in knowing when to set a measure to my labors, both seem to myself, and am, your better. Farewell and be joyous.... (CE XII:295)

Diodati appears to have known his man. The evidence in Milton's early poems on nature and love strongly suggest that Diodati's fair and well-scored thrust pierced Milton's sensibility. Milton's need for such prompting, and the probability that it was given to him repeatedly in personal interchange with Diodati, may have led Milton to give freer reign to such expressions than he might otherwise have done.

As has been pointed out, Milton was to deal more seriously with the bare power of nature when he came to create Comus. But it is clear that he was already conscious of nature's power and knew that any sound philosophy must give heed to nature's sway. For now, however, the accommodation that he made with nature came through love, although this accommodation brought its attendant problems too. Most of the early poems on nature relate her power to love.

It is true that the first such confrontations that Milton describes are fiery ones. So in the Elegia Prima (1626), which could well have been written after Diodati's letter

assigned to 1626, we read:

Ah quoties dignae stupui miracula formae
 Quae possit senium vel reparare Iovis!
 Ah quoties vidi superantia lumina gemmas,
 Atque faces quotquot volvit uterque polus;
 Collaque bis vivi Pelopis quae brachia vincant,
 Quaeque fluit puro nectare tincta via,
 Et decus eximium frontis, tremulosque capillos,
 Aurea quae fallax retia tendit Amor;
 Pellacesque genas, ad quas hyacinthina sordet
 Purpura, et ipse tui floris, Adoni, rubor!

Ah, how many times have I been struck dumb by the miraculous grace of a form which might make decrepit Jove young again! Ah, how many times have I seen eyes which outshine jewels and all the stars that wheel about either pole, necks which excel the arms of Pelops the twice-living and the Way that flows tinctured with pure nectar, and a brow of surpassing loveliness, and waving tresses which were golden nets flung by Cupid, the deceiver! How often have I seen seductive cheeks beside which the purple of the hyacinth and even the blush of your flower, Adonis, turn pale. (53-62, Hughes trans.)

The Elegia Septima (1628 or 1629)¹⁷ expresses the same spirit even more unrestrainedly.

Et modo qua nostri spatiantur in urbe Quirites,
 Et modo villarum proxima rura placent.
 Turba frequens, facieque simillima turba dearum,
 Splendida per medias itque reditque vias.
 Auctaque luce dies gemino fulgore coruscat.
 Fallor? an et radios hinc quoque Phoebus habet?
 Haec ego non fugi spectacula grata severus,
 Impetus et quo me fert iuvenilis agor.
 Lumina liminibus male providus obvia misi,
 Neve oculos potui continuisse meos.
 Unam forte aliis supereminuisse notabam;
 Principium nostri lux erat illa mali.

 Iam tuus O certe est mihi formidabilis arcus,
 Nate dea, iaculis nec minus igne potens;

 Deme meos tandem, verum nec deme, furores;

¹⁷Milton dates this poem "Anno aetatis undevigesimo." The likely date seems to me to be 1628, although 1629 is possible. Parker's date of 1630, with which Hughes now agrees, seems unlikely. In view of such weak evidence for the view they give, it seems unwise to go against the author's dating of his poem. (Cf. LR I:155 & V:373)

Sometimes parts of the town where our citizens walk abroad and sometimes the suburban fields offer me their pleasures. Groups of radiant girls with divinely lovely faces come and go along the walks. When they add their glory, the day shines with double splendour. Am I deceived, or is it from them also that Phoebus has his rays? I did not turn puritanically away from the pleasant sights, but was carried where the impulse of youth led me. Heedlessly I sent my glances to encounter theirs and lost all control of my eyes. Then, by chance, I caught sight of one who was supreme above all the rest; her radiance was the beginning of my disaster....Now, O child of the goddess, with your darts no less powerful than fire, your bow is beyond all doubt dreadful to me.... take away madness, then! But rather, do not take it away. (51-62, 95-96, 99. Hughes trans.)

He was impaled by love. Who has not been? Far more gracious than his appended disclaimer is the honest request with which Milton ends the elegy itself:

Tu modo da facilis, posthaec mea siqua futura est,
Cuspis amatuos figat ut una duos.

Only be gracious enough to grant, if any maiden is ever to be mine, that a single dart shall transfix the destined lovers. (101-102)

After this encounter, it is little wonder that Milton broke out with the Elegia Quinta, on the coming of spring.

The happy fact is that he so quickly found so much pure love for nature and such a splendid tempering of his sense of unrequited love with nature's help. Few poems present in such short scope the loveliness of nature's flowering as Milton's Song On May Morning does.¹⁸

¹⁸ Hughes now dates this 1629-30. Hanford dated it 1628. The latest likely date is 1629 if the Elegia Quinta is dated that same year. Woodhouse gives 1629. See LR I:153 & V:373 for references to datings by other authorities.

Hail bounteous May that dost inspire
 Mirth and youth and warm desire,
 Woods and Groves are of thy dressing,
 Hill and Dale doth boast thy blessing.
 Thus we salute thee with our early Song,
 And welcom thee, and wish thee long. (5-10)

The tone of this greeting to spring could hardly be more sharply contrasted to that given in the Elegia Quinta. That the two were probably written in the course of one spring suggests a spirit quickly master of itself.

Milton's ready mastery over his spirit is even more clearly demonstrated in the sonnet, O Nightingale.¹⁹ Here he shows that he can live gracefully with the problems he confronts even when he cannot yet resolve them. In this sonnet he leaves no doubt of the close link that nature has to love for him and of how much he was affected by their power. Yet he reveals a kind of peace--not that of plenitude but of a deep desire over which his spirit governs.

O Nightingale, that on yon bloomy Spray
 Warbl'st at eve, when all the Woods are still,

 Now timely sing, ere the rude Bird of Hate
 Foretell my hopeless doom in som Grove ny:
 As thou from year to year hast sung too late
 For my relief; yet hadst no reason why,
 Whether the Muse, or Love call thee his mate,
 Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

¹⁹The date of this poem appears to me to correspond with that of the Song On May Morning, i.e., 1628 or 1629. Hughes dates this with the Italian sonnets in 1630 but gives no better reason for doing so than their presumed resemblance to Elegia Quinta and Elegia Septima. What this means is that all of these poems could just as well belong to 1628 or 1629. Again, Milton's dating of the elegies, in view of no strong arguments to go against his dating, leads me to conclude that all these poems belong to the earlier possible dates. Cf. LR I:180 for other datings. I tried to date all the works before I attempted to interpret them for the purposes of this paper. But there appears to be some real internal evidence in terms of the development of Milton's thought for the dates accepted here.

He knows he has a right desire in him and that he has a right to love and sing.

We will never understand Milton if we do not understand him here. He has the lover's rightful yearning to have love fulfilled. Nearly every poem he subsequently wrote could be interpreted as harboring this desire, though both the form and object of his love would change.

It is significant that Milton's one sustained series of poems on love was written in Italian, "the language of which Love makes his boast." F. T. Prince's judgment is no doubt correct that the "Italian influence on Milton's verse is deeper than it had been thought to be," but that as regards his verse "Milton's debt remains of a limited nature."²⁰ But there are reasons to believe that the Italian influence affected Milton's thought materially. Certainly it did so in his Italian poems, which have not yet been given sufficient attention with reference to their content. And as late as 1638 and 1639 Milton considered Italy important enough for him to make it the chief object of his visit to the continent.²¹

J. S. Smart has given us ample reasons to believe that it would be unwise to underestimate the direct and indirect influences of Italy on Milton's mind:

²⁰The Italian Element in Milton's Verse (1954), vii.

²¹Milton left England about May, 1638, and was in Italy from about June, 1638 to June, 1639. He returned to England about July, 1639. See LR I:366-421.

The influence of Italian upon English literature began with Chaucer, who translated from Boccaccio and Petrarch, and caught from their works something more impalpable but more precious than any story or description--the secret of grace and dignity in poetic style. After his death there was a long interruption in our literary communication with Italy; broken in the time of Henry VIII by the minor poets who first introduced the Sonnet into England. During the age of Elizabeth Italian was everywhere. The manner of the poets became Italianate; the Sonnet was copiously cultivated; poetic romance in the Italian way was introduced by Spenser, and Italian comedy had an influence which has not yet been fully explored upon the early works of Shakespeare.

But Milton, who was the last great poet of the age which looked to Italy for inspiration, was also its most complete and accomplished Italian scholar. The theme of his greatest work had already been made familiar as a subject for poetry by Italian writers, however original and independent his treatment actually was. His imagination was coloured by the Italian climate and scenery; and his style was also affected by Italian models.... It was also reserved for Milton to establish in England the more familiar and classical forms of the Italian Sonnet, which had been much neglected, though not wholly and entirely, by his predecessors.²²

The force of these remarks is at least sufficient to justify a careful look at what Milton has to say in his Italian poems on the theme of love.

There is something pure about Milton's treatment of personal love. He makes it both desirable and innocent. For Milton, virtue is the controlling quality in personal love. The almost demanding force of nature's fertility falls back, as the spirit comes forward to determine human love's direction and vitality. He is caught up here too, but this time he is caught up into the spirit of tenderness that delights to tell of the human graces that the beloved bodies forth. The Italian sonnet Donna Leggiadra gives voice to personal love

²²The Sonnets of Milton (1921), 2-3.

most winningly.²³

Donna leggiadra il cui bel nome onora
L'erbosa val di Reno, e il nobil varco,
Ben è colui d' ogni valore scarco
Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora,
Che dolcemente mostrasi di fuora,
De' suoi atti soavi giamai parco,
E i don', che son d'amor saette ed arco,
Là onde l'alta tua virtù s' infiora.

Gentle and beautiful lady, whose fair name
honours the verdant valley of Reno and the
glorious ford, surely he is a man void of all
worth who is not inspired with love by your
gracious spirit. Sweetly it expresses itself
in the bounty of fair looks and the gifts which
are the arrows and the bows of love, there where
your high virtue wears its garland. (1-8)

"Grazia sola," grace alone, he says, could prove more power-
ful in a man than the desire of a lover which the lady's
beauty inspires.

Grazia sola di su gli vaglia, innanti
Che 'l disio amoroso al cuor s' invecchi.

²³The six Italian poems have not been dated with any
accuracy. However, a comparison with Milton's treatment of
the theme of love in other poems would place them in the spring
of 1628 or 1629. I think the date of 1629 is likely.

More important is the value placed on them. Smart may
go too far in stating that they "are a record of his first
love" (133), but he gives a more judicious treatment of their
thought and form than some more recent commentators have.
Brooks and Hardy are to me completely unconvincing in their
brief remarks. To say that the Lady in Sonnet 2 "is probably
Italy herself" (149) seems a mistake. F. T. Prince, while
discounting the significance of the thought expressed in them,
states that Milton had "an altogether personal feeling for the
language" (100). He also states that "the Italian poems as a
whole, remarkable as they are, reveal themselves on consideration
as a daring experiment rather than as an achieved poetic
success" (97). This seems fair, if we recognize the poet's right
to bring convictions into his experiments. However, no one has
yet shown me reasons to disqualify Smart's observation that
some of these sonnets "are perfectly fresh and original" in their
expression (149), and where I find freshness and originality
I feel obliged to give attention to what a poet says.

Grace from above alone can avail him to prevent
the desire of a lover from becoming fixed immov-
ably in his heart. (13-14)

Milton is saying here that if heaven won't help, human nature is powerless against the force that virtuous beauty possesses to win men to love--and there is more than a hint given that God permits the force true love possesses.

But Milton does not presume that every lover's passion lines one up with God. He knows very well that love has an independent power that is not necessarily aligned with the power of God at work in human hearts. Just how high love's yearning went in Milton and how conscious he was of love's divided power is set forth clearly in the sonnet, Qual in Colle Aspro.

Amor lo volse, ed io a l'altrui peso
Seppi ch' Amor cosa mai volse indarno.
Deh! foss' il mio cuor lento e'l duro seno
A chi pianta dal ciel sì buon terreno.

Love willed it, and at the cost of others I
know that Love never willed anything in vain.
Ah, that my dull heart and hard breast might be
as good a soil for Him who plants from heaven. (11-14)

There is not only a sense of divided loyalties here. There is even more the sense of an aspiration to make these loyalties one. The conviction has great force because the poem contains great art. Smart points out that "the picture of the youthful shepherdess is original and Miltonic" (147). The poem forms a triple comparison: of the plant watered by the girl as it strives to grow in an alien region; with the poet's speech in a foreign tongue commandingly called forth by love because of how he feels toward the one of whom he sings; and then, in the last two lines of the sestet, with his desire to be as good a

soil for God to plant in as he is for love. The way the last two lines thrust in upon the theme of love underline at one and the same time the value he places on the one of whom he sings and on the God whose influence he hopes to have.

Prince has observed that "Petrarchan poetry rests ultimately on a Christian idea, the analogy and the conflict between human love and the love of God. Petrarchan poets therefore use the sonnet partly as a vehicle for the expression of the psychology of love, partly for the expression of something more abstract, a system of religious values" (25). There is ample reason to conclude that Milton is writing engagingly in this tradition here.

The Canzone, which in Smart's judgment has the force of originality (149), reads differently if we admit the possibility that Milton was striving to express the overwhelmingly attractive power of love than it does if we assume that every allusion of Milton to himself has nothing to contribute except pride.²⁴ It may be said of the Canzone, as of all of the Italian poems, that in it Milton really seems content to love. He is happy with the love that moves him, as though he is not simply resigned, as in the Elegia Septima, but resolved to let love have its way with him. In the Canzone he is willing to love even though he is told that to do so goes against his own best interests. "E come t'osi?" "How do you dare?", others ask him:

²⁴Brooks and Hardy seem to have misread the lines themselves; at least they do not correctly restate what the poems does (149-150).

altri rivi,
 Altri lidi t' aspettan, ed altre onde
 Nelle cui verdi sponde
 Spuntati ad or, ad or a la tua chioma
 L'immortal guiderdon d'eterne frondi.

Other rivers, other shores and other waters are waiting for you, on whose green banks now, even now, an immortal guerdon of undying leaves is putting forth its shoots to crown your locks. (7-11)

He is taunted by others with the fact of neglected responsibilities--a serious charge, sustained until the final tercet, at which point the decision expressed in the closing couplet is thrust forward with great strength and calm.

Canzon dirotti, e tu per me rispondi:
 Dice mia Donna, e'l suo dir e il mio cuore
 Questa è lingua di cui si vanta Amore.

Canzone, I will tell you, and you shall answer for me: my lady, whose words are my very heart, says, "This is the language of which Love makes his boast." (13-15)

He is really expressing the lover's decision, heroic in its way, to let nothing sway him from his love. This is as much as to say that God and his Muse will understand the need to love. And yet the consciousness of a division of loyalties is set forth clearly, however much the division may be condoned.

In sonnet 4 Milton displays a striking ability--not sufficiently noted--to employ conventional Neoplatonic conceits without being led either to outright worship of an individual or to the etherealizing of the beloved's individuality. The allusive references to her heaven-like effect skillfully draw attention to the uniqueness, the individuality, of her earthly charms. He refers to "sotto nuova idea/ Pellegrina bellezza", "an alien beauty under a new pattern (idea)",

and to:

... 'l cantar che di mezzo l' emispero
 Traviar ben puo la faticosa Luna,
 E degli occhi suoi avventa si gran fuoco

... a gift of song which might draw the labour-
 ing moon from its course in mid-sky. And so
 potent a fire flashes from her eyes (11-13).

The comparison with an ideal nature is here, but it is the
 "pellegrina bellezza," the alien beauty that attention is
 drawn to.

Portamenti alti onesti, e nelle ciglia
 Quel sereno fulgor d' amabil nero,
 Parole adorne di lingua piu d' una,

--a manner nobly decorous, and in her eyes
 that quiet radiance of lovely black, speech
 that is adorned with more than one language,
 (8-10).

Plainly, he does not want to escape the flash of her eyes.
 The "nuova idea" that attracts him so is the kind which he
 freely confesses to be able to rejoice the heart. "Che
 'l cuor bea," he says--he means a girl, who, however strik-
 ingly, "walks on the ground." It is the human graces that
 delight him.

Sonnet 5, poor as it seems to be as poetry, appears to
 express nothing more rash than the feelings that may well up
 in a person in the absence of someone dearly loved. There is
 the allusive suggestion that something in the beloved's
 spirit affects the poet's spirit in an unusual way--by the
 absence of her physical presence. And yet the "caldo vapor,"
 the hot vapor, whose effect the poem describes, remains delib-
 erately undefined.

Che forse amanti nelle lor parole
Chiaman sospir; io non so che si sia:

Perhaps lovers in their language call it a
sigh; I do not know what it may be. (7-8)

Its course is physical: "Da quel lato si spinge ove mi duole,"
"that presses up from that side where my pain lies." (5)

It causes tears of longing:

Ma quanto agli occhi giunge a trovar loco
Tutte le notti a me suol far piovose

But the part of it which comes to find a place
in my eyes makes all my nights rainy. (12-13)

And it is the physical return of the lady whom he has missed
that brings delight to his senses and calm to his spirit again:
"Finche mia Alba rivien colma di rose," "Until my Dawn returns,
surcharged with roses." (14) Here it is a single final line
that gives intensity to the power of the beloved, by means of
her human graces, to bring the poet peace. I find this a
happy tribute to the one the poet loves. There is no effort
to demand of her more than a human power to charm. It is true
that the feelings which he contrasts with her power to charm
are sentimental ones, and that the sonnet is the least mature
of the six Italian poems. But the feelings expressed are like
those sometimes produced by love, and the poet does not strain
them to carry him higher than earth can bear. In this he was
more modest than many of his Petrarchan predecessors were.
Love, however, powerful, did not supplant for Milton the
heaven that only God provides.

Along with many others, Prince recognizes that Sonnet 6
"in sentiment is by far the most individual of the series" (99).
That this sonnet constitutes the final poem in a series deserves

a special note. Smart has commented with precision on the tradition of the sonnet, that "from the first beginning it was the favourite metre of love poetry, sometimes in single utterances, more frequently in a series of poems which commemorated the history of the writer's affection and its final issue" (4). It is with the final issue of his affection that Milton is concerned in Sonnet 6. For he is concerned about the dedication of his life.

Giovane piano, e semplicetto amante,
Poiche fuggir me stesso in dubbio sono,
Madonna a voi del mio cuor l'humil dono
Faro divoto;...

Young, gentle and candid lover that I am,
because I am doubtful, my lady, how to fly from
myself, I shall make the humble gift of my heart
in devotion to you. (1-4)

His problem is whether to follow the way of life he has hitherto chosen to aspire to or to accept a new way of life he is called to by his love. Being ingenuous ("semplicetto"), he says, as well as young and gentle, he can deny neither what he feels in his heart to be true to his own nature nor what is demanded by the spirit of self-abandonment to which he is moved by love. He cannot deny the demands of his own nature, but yields first place to love. So he makes a humble gift of his heart--of the center of his nature and his aspirations--in devotion to his love. Confronted with a clear awareness of the question of where first loyalties lie, the poet expresses very winningly his resolution to place his necessary loyalty to himself in the hands of his love. His love, he implies, is worthy of his complete trust as well as his complete fidelity. Thus the first effect of the poem is to

underline what it is that gives so much attractive power to the one he loves: the virtue, inherent in her nature, like his own.

The poem is not without self-interest--love is a condition compact of desire--but the self-interest is subsumed under the compelling interest in the one he loves. There is no reason to confine the poet's description of the virtues of his heart to a Stoic one. To do so would make the poem a retractation of a wrong philosophy, a hitherto unyielding way of life. This is a perfectly acceptable reading if it is right. But there is more than a suggestion that the poet's past concern has been to maintain his integrity against evil influences and to serve the good.

io certo a prove tante
L'ebbi fedele, intrepido, costante,
Di pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono.

In countless ordeals I have proved it faithful,
courageous and constant, and in its thoughts
gracious, courteous and good. (4-6)

The picture seems to be at least that of Aristotle's man of magnanimity (a doctrine which in its Christian form has more sides to it than C. S. Lewis draws attention to in English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (1954), 53). What suggests itself to me is the figure of a young Homeric hero, an Italianate Ulysses on an odyssey to prepare himself for reunion with the person who for him calls forth true love--a young adventurer, resisting and overcoming much, so that at last he can yield his heart when it finds its true home.

But all such parallels are inexact. We must not forget that the sonnet as a poetic form sprang from the life of medieval society and that "the love expressed was such as had not

been known to Greek or Latin literature" (Smart, p. 4). Smart also reminds us that it was part of the established convention of the sonnet that "the poet speaks in his own person, reveals his own emotions, and takes the reader into his confidence without reserve" (4). Furthermore, neither in Italy nor in England did the sonnet writer confine himself solely to the theme of love. "Intimate and subjective" as it was, Smart wrote, "the sonnet also acquired a social purpose and meaning" (4).

Prince's remarks on Della Casa may help us in our reading of Milton's sonnet, especially since we know that Milton owned a copy of Della Casa's sonnets in 1629 (LR I:205):

like many another Petrarchan love-poet and perhaps like Petrarch himself, Della Casa writes more moving poetry when he withdraws a certain distance from the object of his emotions and makes his poem a moral reflection on his own state of mind and way of life. We have here a process implicit in Petrarch's type of love-poetry, and one which accounts for the emergence of the Heroic Sonnet from that tradition (25).

Prince then goes on to remind us, as quoted on p. 32 above, that Petrarchan poets use the sonnet to express a system of religious values as well as a psychology of love.

In Sonnet 6 Milton does make "a moral reflection on his own state of mind and way of life." We are brought back by the poem to the poet's individuality. Quite simply, the poet says that he loves and is ready to yield the best he has to love. There is not the least constraint in his decision; instead, there is a willing assent to what love draws him to do. He is willing to trust the dedication of his life to love. The image of a young man of high ideals and strong

spirit yielding honorably to a woman's virtuous love has always been a most affecting one. It is so here. Much has been given, if only in a poem: the gift of oneself. Only love moves one to give like that. The final force of the poem is a moving tribute to the one so loved.²⁵

The poem has another force as well, and that is to move the reader of the poem. Although I think C. S. Lewis misjudges a poet's and a reader's interest "in the history of a love affair," he is certainly correct in pointing out that a poet has even stronger reasons to write. It does not seem quite accurate to state that "the sonneteers wrote not to tell their own love stories, not to express whatever in their own loves was local and peculiar"--some of the best of them seem to me to have gained force by what was local and peculiar in the love they gave expression to. But it is certainly right that, beyond such interests, the sonneteers wrote "to give us others, the inarticulate lovers, a voice." (327, 490)

Any poem is written to be read. And when a poet writes of love, no doubt he hopes to move the reader of the poem as he himself has been moved. Therefore, we should not read Milton's sonnets (or any of his poems) as exercises in autobiography. A poem is never merely that. We should read

²⁵The question of whether the object of Milton's love is real or imaginary does not appear to me to affect our interest in the poems. Insofar as we allow to a poet force of imagination and strength of mind, we must admit that he may deal with convictions that affect him personally without a physical object being present to call forth such thoughts. As C. S. Lewis says of Sidney's Defence of Poetry, "what is in question is not man's right to sing but his right to feign, to 'make things up'" (318). Lewis also offers the opinion that "it is perhaps always more probable that any young poet is in love than that he is not," (491) and this is as apt to apply to Milton as to anyone.

them as expressions of convictions passionately felt, to which the writer hopes to win adherents. Here, in his Italian poems, I suppose Milton wants to win our loyalty to love. He tries to show that love on earth is good; that while it does not answer all the questions raised by life, love is an influence that we have a right to trust; and that to trust it without fear of being harmed, we must have proved our own hearts can be true: there must be a correspondence between the lover and the loved. These seem agreeable convictions for a poet to make an effort to impart.

The resolution of Milton's double loyalty, to God and to love and the art that love inspired, was soon to find its expression in the Nativity Ode. But we as readers can be thankful that before this resolution came about Milton was so stirred by the power of nature and felt so fully the sway of love. For what is it to be young and what will anyone be able to write about if he never confronts this double loyalty, to the stirrings of love for some beloved and the stirrings of love for God? Milton accepted life, as one must, long before he had resolved its divergencies. His expressions of personal love and of his love for nature, together with his deep love of antiquity, were as genuine and impressive as the devotion to religion that came to motivate his life.

Perhaps Milton succeeded in wresting personal love from nature's sway and making it so pure an entity because friendship was already such a force for him. His letters and elegies to Diodati and Thomas Young, together with the lines On Shakespear and the much later Epitaphium Damonis make it

plain how much the force of friendship and generosity was present in him and how readily he responded to the presence of these attributes in others.

Even in the Prolusiones Quaedam Oratoriae²⁶ he deals

²⁶It may be convenient to review the dates of the Prolusions here. About all that can be said with certainty is that they were written in Milton's Cambridge period, April, 1625 to July, 1632. If we allow Milton time to learn before he spoke, we can place the Prolusions between the spring of 1626 and summer of 1632. Woodhouse's suggestion that Milton chose to publish them in chronological order is a logical one. Yet, judging from Milton's arrangements of his published poems, there is no sure reason to accept this point of view. The following are the dates, however tentative, that seem to me acceptable.

First Prolusion. 1626 or 1627. See footnote 15 on page 19 for a discussion of this.

Second Prolusion. 1626 or 1627. Parker dates this Prolusion earlier than 1628. Cf. LR V:374.

Third Prolusion. 1627. By this date Milton would have had time to bring understanding to the fire of his thoughts on a better education than that of the scholastics, and yet would still have been conscious of the antagonism of his opponents and the shrewdness of bringing Aristotle in to defend his views. This is probably the Prolusion that drew the favorable response that in the Sixth Prolusion Milton says was given to his oration made "some months ago."

Fourth Prolusion. Winter or spring, 1628. Woodhouse suggests May, 1628.

Fifth Prolusion. Spring, 1628. French's suggestion of 1625 seems unlikely. The knotted arguments of this Prolusion and the preceding one suggest that Milton would have needed time to study the "substance" and the "form" of which he wrote.

Sixth Prolusion. July, 1628. The almost certain date, as is commonly agreed upon.

Seventh Prolusion. Spring, 1632. The work is mature beyond anything expected in an exercise. Masson's recognition of it as a requirement Milton fulfilled toward the Master's degree is almost certainly correct. See The Life of John Milton, vol. I (rev. ed., 1881), p. 29.

forcefully with the subject of friendship, as he had reason to because of early disagreements with his fellow students concerning their studies. Milton did not buy friendship at the expense of conviction, and yet at this point conviction cost him much. He was both candid and realistic when he referred to these differences with his fellow students in his

First Prolusion.

Etenim qui possim ego vestram sperare benevolentiam, cum in hoc tanto concursu, quot oculis intueor tot ferme aspiciam infesta in me capita; adeo ut Orator venisse videar ad non exorabiles. Tantum potest ad simultates etiam in Scholis aemulatio, vel diversa Studia, vel in eisdem studiis diversa iudicia sequentium....

For how can I hope for your good-will, when in all this great assembly I encounter none but hostile glances, so that my task seems to be to placate the implacable? So provocative of animosity, even in the home of learning, is the rivalry of those who pursue different studies or whose opinions differ concerning the studies they pursue.

(CE XII:118-120. P.B. Tillyard trans., p. 53)

Yet even here the fact of friendship is called on as a power:

Veruntamen ne penitus despondeam animum, sparsim video, ni fallor, qui mihi ipso aspectu tacito, quam bene velint, haud obscure significant....

Yet to prevent complete despair, I see here and there, if I do not mistake, some who without a word show clearly by their looks how well they wish me.

(CE XII:120. Tillyard, p. 53)

His preference for the approval of only a few over that of those who are willfully ignorant is set forth with satiric vigor in a passage that shows little of Olympian calm. (See CE XII:120-121). Milton gives evidence of having had a spirit warm enough to start some fire, whether of friendship or of animosity.

Either the same year or the following, his fellow

students began to recognize the merits in Milton's nature and to respond favorably to him. Milton was both generous and realistic in the appreciation that he showed toward their changed attitude. He speaks of this in his Sixth Prolusion. He expresses gratitude for their friendliness and the approval of a recent exercise accorded him even by those who had been hostile. "Generosum utique simultatis exercendae genus, & regio pectore non indignum," "a generous way indeed of displaying rivalry, and one worthy of a royal nature!", he says to them. (CE XII:207-208. Tillyard, p. 86). He had reason to understand the truth of his words when he said: "quid enim est quod citius conciliet, diutiusque retineat amicitias, quam amoenum & festivum ingenium?" "what is it that more quickly conciliates and retains friendships longer than a cheerful and agreeable disposition?" (CE XII:216-217). No doubt he learned this fact as much from the spirited Diodati as from the reconciliation of his differences with his fellow students. Even in the midst of such differences, friendship had become a compelling power for him.

Among the strongest of Milton's Latin works is the early Elegia Quarta (1627),²⁷ to his former tutor, Thomas Young. Here the amazing virility of his imagination, coupled with his love of myth, legend and biblical history, are employed to give earnestness and concreteness to that generous concern which is the soul of friendship. Whatever these lines owe to the ancients, who would not want to have from the pen of a friend such words as these?

²⁷Milton dates this poem "Anno aetatis 18." Parker and Hughes suggest the spring of 1627. Cf. LR I:129.

Ille quidem est animae plusquam pars altera
nostrae;
Dimidio vitae vivere cogor ego.

Truly, that man is more than the other half of
my soul and without him I am compelled to live
a life which is but the half of itself. (19-20)

In his concern for his former tutor's welfare in a troubled
Germany, Milton's youthful imagination is firmly harnessed
to reality. He speaks with feeling of the ministry that
Young has undertaken there, as if to encourage Young to
find his bulwark against difficulties right in that work.
So he speaks of Young as:

Caelestive animas saturantem rore tenellas,
Grande salutiferae religionis opus.

watering tender souls with the dew of heaven,
which is the grand affair of healing religion.
(45-46)

And he refers to ministers as men

qui laeta ferunt de caelo nuntia, quique
Quae via post cineres ducat ad astra docent....

who bring glad tidings from heaven and teach
the way which leads beyond the grave to the
stars.... (93-94)

Milton leaves no doubt that for him religion's power must be
a personal one.

In this Elegy, Milton is moved to affirm some strongly
held convictions, intended here to comfort and support Young in
his personal anxiety.

At tu sume animos, nec spes cadat anxia curis,
Nec tua concutiat decolor ossa metus.

.....

Namque eris ipse Dei radiante sub aegide tutus;
Ille tibi custos, et pugil ille tibi.... (105-106,
111-112)

But take heart and do not let your anxious hope
yield to your embarrassments nor pale fear strike

palsy to your bones.... For you shall be secure under the radiant aegis of God; he will be your guardian and he will be your champion....

Beneath this Biblical conviction that Milton was to reaffirm so memorably in A Mask rests a clear understanding of what human emotions are like under stress and of the need to strengthen all the resources in oneself at such a time. Really to believe that God will help requires something from the man who so believes, he says:

Et tu (quod superest miseris) sperare memento,
Et tua magnanimo pectore vince mala.

And for your part--because hope is the right of the unhappy--remember to hope, and let your magnanimous heart triumph over your misfortunes.
(123-124)

"Nec dubites," "do not doubt", Milton writes to Young, and this could be the opening phrase to all the counsel Milton ever gives. To refuse to disbelieve in God, to remember to hope--this will bring a man to triumph in his heart and bring his heart to magnanimity, above the power of calamity to efface. Milton understood already something of what Christian character is like and of the direction that a Christian life must take.

It is to Diodati that he speaks most warmly of what friendship means. In his letter to Diodati of September 23, 1637 (CE XII:28), Milton links virtue with friendship most affectingly:

Non enim in Epistolarum ac Salutationum momentis veram verti amicitiam volo, quae omnia ficta esse possunt; sed altis animi radicibus niti utrinque & sustinere se; coeptamque sinceris, & sanctis rationibus, etiamsi mutua cessarent officia, per omnem tamen vitam suspicione & culpa vacare: ad quam fovendam non tam scripto sit opus, quam viva invicem virtutum recordatione. Nec continuo, ut tu non scripseris, non erit quo illud suppleri officium possit, scribit vicem tuam apud me tua probitas, verasque literas intimis, sensibus meis

exarat, scribit morum simplicitas, & recti amor;
scribit ingenium etiam tuum, haudquaquam quotid-
ianum, & majorem in modum te mihi commendat.

For I would not have true friendship tried by the test of letters and good wishes, which may all be feigned; but its roots and the source of its strength should go deep into the mind, and it should spring from a pure origin, so that, even were all tokens of mutual regard to cease, yet it should endure throughout life, untainted by suspicion or recrimination. For its nurture the written word is less essential than a lively recollection of virtues on both sides. Nor does it follow that, in default of your writing, there is nothing to supply the omission; your integrity writes to me in your stead, and indites true letters on the tablets of my heart; the purity of your life and your love of virtue write to me, your whole character too, far above the common, writes to me and commends you to me more and more.

(CE XII:24. Tillyard, p. 13)

This letter was one of the Familiarium Epistolarum published, with Milton's consent, in 1674. There is something in it for the reader to take home. What stands out is both the warmth of feeling expressed toward Diodati himself and yet a readiness like that of ardor to cherish similar qualities in anyone.

Unde fit, ut qui, spretis quae vulgus prava rerum
aestimatione opinatur, id sentire & loqui & esse
audet; quod summa per omne aevum sapientia
optimum esse docuit, illi me protinus, sicubi
reperiam, necessitate quadam adjungam. Quod si
ego sive natura, sive meo fato ita sum comparatus,
ut nulla contentione, & laboribus meis ad tale
decus & fastigium laudis ipse valeam emergere;
tamen quo minus qui eam gloriam assecuti sunt,
aut eo feliciter aspirant, illos semper colam,
& suspiciam, nec Di i puto, nec homines prohibuerint.

And so, whensoever I find one who spurns the base opinions of common men, and dares to be, in thought and word and deed, that which the wisest minds throughout the ages have approved; whensoever, I say, I find such a man, to him I find myself impelled forthwith to cleave. And if I am fated, either by nature or destiny, never to attain this high honour and glory in my own proper person, for

all my toil and striving, yet sure I am that
neither god nor man shall forbid me to honour
and revere all my days those who have won such
glory as this, or are happily striving toward it.
(CE XII:26. Tillyard, p. 14)

There is no question that Milton held a high ideal for life. Yet it was an ideal that he believed to be embodied in good men, not one that no man could attain. "Tui similes impossibile est quin amem," he wrote to Diodati--"it is impossible for me not to love such men as you." As he was by so much else, Milton was caught up by the power of friendship too.

Milton could be generous with both his interest and his praise. If generosity is a virtue, one can discover what this quality is like by dwelling long upon the moving tribute that Milton makes to Shakespeare. ²⁸

Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a live-long Monument.
.....
Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving;
And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,
That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die.
(7-8, 13-16)

What makes this praise so rich is the real sense of gratitude that it conveys.

Milton could praise the living in the same rich way he eulogized the dead. Not only do his words addressed to Diodati show us this, but those to his father also do. Milton's success in conveying the sense of grateful praise in Ad Patrem ²⁹ is all the more striking because the poem is

²⁸ "On Shakespear. 1630." First published in 1632.

²⁹ This poem almost certainly comes within the Horton period, 1632-1638. Hughes dating of 1634 seems reasonable. There are, however, many divergent views. See LR I:274 & V:380-381.

largely an effort to win his father's approval of his decision to make poetry his career. But he gives his father reason to be won. From childhood, he says, his father has been his greatest help, even to the extent of persuading him to go further in his studies than he might have done on his own. So it is to his father, he says, that he owes his greatest debt. The acknowledgment of that debt is a happy one:

Officium cari taceo commune parentis;
Me poscunt maiora.

.....

Denique quicquid habet caelum, subiectaque caelo
Terra parens, terraeque et caelo interfluit aer,
Quicquid et unda tegit, pontique agitabile marmor,
Per te nosse licet, per te, si nosse libebit.

.....

Quae potuit maiora pater tribuisse, vel ipse
Iupiter, excepto, donasset ut omnia, caelo?

.....

Sit memorasse satis, repetitaque munera grato
Percensere animo, fidaeque reponere menti.

I will not mention a father's usual generosity, for greater things have a claim on me....And finally, all that heaven contains and earth, our mother, beneath the sky, and the air that flows between earth and heaven, and whatever the waters and the trembling surface of the sea cover, your kindness gives me the means to know, if I care for the knowledge that your kindness offers.... What greater gift could come from a father, or from Jove himself if he had given everything, with the single exception of heaven?... Let it suffice that with a grateful mind I remember and tell over your constant kindnesses, and lay them up in a loyal heart.

(77-78, 86-89, 95-96, 113-114)

These lines rise well above the level of flattery. They do convey the poet's gratitude and help us understand that dedication to a chosen way of life can be a proof of personal loyalty.

Milton's poem in praise of John Baptista Manso, the patron of Italian poets, contrasts sharply with the compelling

lines he had addressed earlier to his father. The poem, Mansus,³⁰ is in fact the one great exception to Milton's power to praise convincingly. It seems almost as though the poem itself "*Imprudens Italas ausa est volitare per urbes*," "has recently presumed to make her rash flight through the cities of Italy" (29). The trouble is not that the praise of Manso's meritorious acts or the statements of the poet's own hopes have no validity. The trouble is that they fail to win the reader to respond. Probably Milton did not here "strictly meditate the thankless Muse" sufficiently to make the subject come alive for him. In addition to this, however, there is a peculiarity in the thought which contributes much to make the poem less than a compelling one. Milton simply makes too much of the kind of immortality bestowed by praise. He is not content to call Manso "*diis dilecte senex*," "old man beloved of the gods." Along with Tasso and Marini, he says,

*Tu quoque in ora frequens venies plausumque virorum,
Et parili carpes iter immortale volatu.*

your name and fame also shall constantly be in
men's mouths, and with flight no less swift than
theirs you shall mount the way of immortality.

(52-53)

A person has a right to be remembered, but very much of this is not the way to make men want to do so. However, the Italians of the time appeared to think it was, and Milton was writing Mansus primarily with his Italian acquaintances in mind. In fact, what is unusual in a poem, he was apparently writing it as much for Manso himself as anyone.

³⁰The poem belongs to the period of Milton's stay in Italy, 1638-1639.

If Milton was extravagant in Manso's honor, he had shown much earlier and was to show again how much his mind could go out to the interests of his friends and relate those interests to the interests of all men. When it came to friendship, Milton showed he had a spirit that really cared. He had made this clear enough in poems like the Elegia Quarta and in letters to his friends. He made it poignantly evident in the Epitaphium Damonis, written two years after Diodati's death in 1638.³¹ The poem will be considered more fully at a later point, but enough must be said here to show the abiding effect that friendship had for Milton.

Milton's loss at Diodati's death was real. He was conscious of the influence that Diodati had had on him. "Pectora cui credam?" "to whom shall I confide my heart?" he asks.

quis me lenire docebit
Mordaces curas, quis longam fallere noctem
Dulcibus alloquiis, grato cum sibilat igni
Molle pirum, et nucibus strepitat focus, at
malus auster
Miscet cuncta foris, et desuper intonat ulmo.

Who will teach me to alleviate my mordant cares
and shorten the long night with delightful conversation while the ripe pear simmers before the grateful fire and nuts burst on the hearth, when the wicked southwind makes general confusion outside and thunders in the peak of the elm tree?
(45-49)

He was conscious, too, of how rare such friendship is: "Vix sibi quisque parem de millibus invenit unum," "a man can hardly find a comrade for himself in a thousand" (108).

³¹Summer, 1640 appears to be the correct date. See LR II:19 & V:343.

For Milton, Diodati was such a one. He expresses with great tenderness the wish that he might have been with Diodati when he died. Nowhere does he make us feel his care more real than here.

Ah! certe extremum licuisset tangere dextram,
Et bene compositos placide morientis ocellos,
Et dixisse, 'Vale! nostri memor ibis ad astra.'

.....

Quamquam etiam vestri nunquam meminisse pigebit,
Pastores Tusci, Musis operata iuventua,
Hic Charis, atque Lepos....

Ah! had I not gone, surely I might have touched his right hand at the last and closed his eyes as he lay peacefully dying, and have said, 'Farewell! remember me in your flight to the stars.'... Though I shall never weary of your memory, Tuscan shepherds, youths in the service of the Muses, yet here was grace and here was gentleness.... (121-123, 125-127)

These lines express a clear-eyed kind of faith, like that in An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester, except that here the faith is far more deeply felt because the person who has died was dearly loved. Milton carried his devotion for Diodati as near as men on earth can get to heaven's door. The poem rises, as it is resolved, on a crescendo of faith. "Quis putet?" "who would suppose such a thing?" he exclaims, concerning the riches of heaven's reality. And then he says of Diodati:

Tu quoque in his--nec me fallit spes lubrica, Damon--
Tu quoque in his certe es; nam quo tua dulcis abiret
Sanctaque simplicitas, nam quo tua candida virtus?

You also are among them--for no uncertain hope deceives me, Damon--certainly you also are among them; for where else should your sweet and holy simplicity have gone? Where else your unsullied virtue?

(198-200)

"Nec me fallit spes lubrica, Damon--", "no uncertain hope



deceives me, Damon", as if his friend in heaven can almost hear him now, and as if the poet would impart such hope to others if he can. Milton is doing what he can to say that friendship doesn't end in death--it ends in faith, the assurance we can have that friendship bears eternally the seal of God's own love.

It seems necessary to conclude that Milton was a man whose spirit caught fire from friendship and that this friendship and this fire are virtues that he hoped his works might help impart.

CHAPTER TWO

REALITIES: SOME EARLY EXERCISES

It must not be supposed that the young Milton altogether lacked a consciousness of man's decrepitude or that he could not yet portray evil vigorously. He was conscious of what evil and mankind are like long before he wrote in the Epitaphium Damonis that:

Nos durum genus, et diris exercita fatis
Gens, homines, aliena animis, et pectore discors....

We men are a painful race, a stock tormented by
cruel fate, with minds mutually alienated and
hearts discordant.... (106-107)

He held the belief at a very early age that ignorance and error and even the effects of time are as inseparably linked to the corruption of men themselves as to some fateful power that overtakes them. Whether or not it was written as an exercise for someone else, Milton's lamentation over the corruption of man's mind is powerfully expressed in the opening verses of Naturam Non Pati Senium (1628).¹

Heu quam perpetuis erroribus acta fatiscit
Avia mens hominum, tenebrisque immersa profundis
Oedipodioniam volvit sub pectore noctem!
Quae vesana suis metiri facta deorum
Audet, et incisas leges adamante perenni
Assimilare suis, nulloque solubile saeclo
Consilium fati perituris alligat horis.

¹The likeliest date. See LRI: 162 & V:374. cf. Hughes, Complete Poems, 32-33.

Alas! how persistent are the errors by which the wandering mind of man is pursued and overwearied, and how profound is the darkness of the Oedipean night in his breast! His insane mind dare make its own acts the measure of those of the gods and compare its own laws to those that are written upon eternal adamant; and it binds the eternally immutable plan of fate to the perishing hours.
(1-7)

Milton says that man, by trying to make himself the measurer of the gods, blinds himself, and instead of becoming a god, he justifies the threat he faces from a destroying power.

We must be clear about just what this poem says. It is based on the premise that nature shares the corruption of mankind but that God decrees that nature shall renew herself and not run down with age, until God destroys creation in a final fire. Ultimately, only God can be the destroyer of what he made; until he chooses to destroy, nature goes on. But within the ongoing of nature is included the ravaging effect of time. Time is still "insatiabile tempus," "insatiable time." Except for God, nothing would be immune from "temporis...malo," "the evil of time." It is the vigour of creation that God renews:

*Nec variant elementa fidem, solitoque fragore
Lurida percussas iaculantur fulmina rupes.
Nec per inane furit leviori murmure Corus,
Stringit et armiferos aequali horrore Gelonos
Trux Aquilo, spiratque hiemem, nimbosque volutat.*

The elements do not vary from their faith and with their accustomed uproar the lightning-bolts strike and shatter the rocks. Corus goes raging with no gentler voice through the void and the ferocious Aquilo torments the armed Scythians with undiminished chill as he breathes out winter and sweeps the clouds along.
(51-55)

By means of that vigor the wheat and tares of nature grow up

alike. There is beauty, but there is something else.

Sed neque, Terra, tibi saeculi vigor ille vetusti
Priscus abest; servatque suum Narcissus odorem;
Et puer ille suum tenet, et puer ille, decorem,
Phoebe tuusque et Cypri tuus, nec ditior olim
Terra datum sceleri celavit montibus aurum
Conscia, vel sub aquis gemmas.

Nor has the pristine vigour of your earliest time
forsaken you, O Earth. Narcissus still preserves
his fragrance. Your beloved youth, O Phoebus,
and yours, O Cypris, still keep their beauty; nor
did the earth in times past conceal beneath the
mountains a greater wealth of the gold which her
bad conscience knows is to be the root of evil,
nor hide more gems beneath the seas. (60-65)

The reference to Narcissus is not without significance, and
earth is "conscia," conscious of guilt over her own wealth.
Nature does not run down, but her renewal is not such as to
circumvent the need for God's ultimate fire.

...Sic denique in aevum
Ibit cunctarum series iustissima rerum,
Donec flamma orbem populabitur ultima, late
Circumplexa polos et vasti culmina caeli
Ingentiue rogo flagrabit machina mundi.

...Thus, in a word, the righteous sequence of all
things shall go on perpetually, until the final
fire shall destroy the world, enveloping the
poles and summits of vast heaven, while the fab-
ric of the universe consumes in a mighty funeral
pyre. 11. 65-69.

This poem, replete with sensuous perceptions expressed by
means of classical imagery, nevertheless adheres to a Christ-
ian conception of creation and its course with a rigor that
is astonishing. Milton could make a scalpel of his mind. He
used the colors handed down to him from Greece and Rome, but
he used them here to brighten an imprint of creation etched
in Christian lines.

The sequence of poems on the Gunpowder Plot shows that

even earlier Milton was as vigorously Protestant as a good Cambridge scholar ought to be. The early In Quintum Novembris (1626)² demonstrates that the young Milton could be as severe in depicting evil as he could be tender in describing love. Milton already has a vivid conception of an evil power, unearthly in its origin but prompt to wreak havoc upon earth when it can and forever seeking allies for its evil cause.

Cum ferus ignifluo regnans Acheronte tyrannus,
Eumenidum pater, aetherio vagus exul Olympo,
Forte per immensum terrarum erraverat orbem,
Dinumerans sceleris socios, verasque fideles,
Participes regni post funera moesta futuros.
Hic tempestates medio ciet aere diras;
Illic unanimes odium struit inter amicos.

The cruel tyrant who governs the fiery streams of Acheron, the father of the Eumenides, the wandering outcast from the celestial Olympus, chanced to range through the vast circle of the earth, counting the companions of his wickedness, his faithful slaves, who are destined after their miserable deaths to take their share in his kingdom. (7-13)

This is no uncertain devil Milton portrays. He is a being moved to evil by the sight of good.

Armat et invictas in mutua viscera gentes,
Regnaque olivifera vertit florentia pace;
Et quoscunque videt purae virtutis amantes,
Hos cupit adiacere imperio, fraudumque magister
Tentat inaccessum sceleri corrumpere pectus,...

Here he stirs up wild tempests in mid air; there he instigates hatred among loyal friends. He arms unconquerable nations for a death-struggle together and overturns kingdoms which are flourish-

2

One of the few studies of this poem is that of Macon Cheek. He calls it "Virgilian in its larger movements" and "in its smaller details" (175-177). Otherwise he finds it of interest only for its slight suggestions of the Satanic circle depicted much later by Milton.

ing under the olive of peace. Whatever lovers of pure virtue he can find, he seeks to add to his empire and--master of guile that he is--he tries to corrupt even the heart that is locked against sin. (14-18)

He cannot stand the sight of "festa pace," "festal peace," and the practice of true religion makes him breathe fire. So at the sight of

...venerantem numina veri
Sancta Dei populum, tandem suspiria rupit
Tartareos ignes et luridum olentia sulphur.

...a people worshipping the sacred deity of the true God, he broke into sighs that were redolent of lurid sulphur and the fires of Tarturus. (33-35)

Just as the true religion is, of course, the English Protestant one, so the deceiver's ally is the Pope, "regum dominator, Phlegetontius haeres," "the tamer of kings, and heir of hell," in Milton's militantly Protestant view. After instructing the Pope, the deceiver took off his disguise and fled "ad infandam, regnum illaetabile, Lethen," "to the unspeakable and joyless kingdom, Lethe." But the Pope calls forth Murder and Treason to his aid. The picture of the dark cave in which they make their home is a memorable one.

Est locus aeterna septus caligine noctis,
Vasta ruinosi quondam fundamina tecti,
Nunc torvi spelunca Phoni, Prodotaque bilinguis,
Efferat quos uno peperit Discordia partu.
Hic inter caementa iacent praeruptaque saxa
Ossa inhumata virum, et traiecta cadavera ferro;
Hic Dolus intortis semper sedet ater ocellis,
Iurgiaque, et stimulis armata Calumnia fauces,
Et Furor, atque viae moriendi mille, videntur,
Et Timor, exanguisque locum circumvolat Horror,
Perpetuoque leves per muta silentia Manes
Exululant, tellus et sanguine conscia stagnat.
Ipsi etiam pavidum latitant penetralibus antri
Et Phonos et Prodotes, nulloque sequente per antrum,
Antrum horrens, scopulosum, atrum feralibus umbris,
Diffugiunt sotes, et retro lumina vortunt.

There is a place wrapped eternally in the darkness of night, once the vast foundation of a structure now ruinous which has become the den of brutal Murder and double-tongued Treason, twins whom savage Discord bore. Here amid rubble and shattered rock lie the unburied bones of men and corpses pierced by steel; here forever sits dark Guile with eyes distorted, and Contentions and Calumny with her fang-armed jaws, and Fury and a thousand ways of dying and Fear are seen. Pale Horror wings about the place and unsubstantial ghosts shriek perpetually through the mute silences. The conscious earth rots with blood. Murder and Treason themselves shudder in the inmost depths of the cavern and, though no one pursues them, through the cave--a horrid cave with outcropping rocks and dark with deathly shadows--the guilty pair flee away with many a backward glance. (139-154)

One does not have to be a Protestant to recognize that Milton could approach even the enemy with the eyes of his imagination open and portray evil with such luxurious severity that he could give it a character of its own.

But God, who still rules all, will not let evil exceed its bounds.

*Interea longo flectens curvamine caelos
Despicit aetherea dominus qui fulgurat arce,
Vanaque perversae ridet conamina turbae,
Atque sui causam populi volet ipse tueri.*

Meanwhile the Lord, who turns the heavens in their wide revolution and hurls the lightning from his skyey citadel, laughs at the vain undertakings of the degenerate mob and is willing to take upon himself the defence of his people's cause. (166-169)

The divine laughter is put into action by making Fame thwart the cause of the Deceiver she so often helps. Here Milton is realistic in assessing the true character of fame.

*Millenisque loquax auditaque visaque linguis
Cuilibet effundit temeraria; veraque mendax
Nunc minuit, modo confictis sermonibus auget.*

With a thousand tongues the blab recklessly pours out what she has heard and seen to any auditor, and lyingly she pares down the truth or enlarges

it with fabrications.

(191-193)

And yet there is nothing ungrudging in his recognition of her help.

Sed tamen a nostro meruisti carmine laudes,
Fama, bonum quo non aliud veracius ullum,
Nobis digna cani, nec te memorasse pigebit
Carmine tam longo.

Nevertheless, O Fame, you deserved the praise of our song, for one good deed than which there was never any more genuine. You deserve that I should sing about you and I shall never regret this commemoration of you at such length in my song.

(194-197)

However, it is still God who holds even the wayward influences in his power.

Te Deus, aeternos motu qui temperat ignes,
Fulmine praemisso, alloquitur, terraque tremante:
"Fama, siles?"

.....

Nec plura, illa statim sensit mandata Tonantis,

God, who controls the eternal fires in their motion, hurled his thunderbolt and, while the earth still trembled, he said to you: "Fame, are you silent?"... He said no more, but she instantly responded to the Thunderer's command.

(199-201, 205)

Milton is using the occasion of the Gunpowder Plot to say that there is evil, but that there is God much more.

God may give aid, but Milton makes no effort in his works to pretend that men are not deceived. There is a Deceiver, but it is men who let themselves become deceived. For Milton, error was long ago written large upon the human mind, and it is man's everlasting labor here on earth to win some victories over her for truth. He makes error really the child of ignorance and suggests that both took harbor in man upon man's Fall. So in the First Prolusion he says that even the ancient poets were not free from error, because of

the all-pervading ignorance of the age in which they lived. We do not need revelation to know this, he says. Poetry and philosophy, themselves inspired by God, tell us that the poets sometimes erred.

At enim vetant humaniores Musae, ipsa etiam
prohibet Philosophia Diis proxima, ne Poetis
Deorum figulis, praesertim Graecanicis, omni ex
parte habeamus fidem; nec quisquam iis hoc probro
datum putet, quod in re tanti momenti Authores
videantur vix satis locupletes.

But the more cultured Muses and Philosophy herself, the neighbour of the gods, forbid us to place entire confidence in the poets who have given the gods their forms, especially the Greek poets; and no one should regard it as a reproach to them that in a question of such importance they hardly seem sufficiently reliable authorities.

(CE XII:128. Tillyard, 56)

Among the philosophers it was, especially Aristotle and his followers who, in Milton's view, were apt to foster and perpetuate the errors of mankind. He thought they usually did so for a reason opposite to that which made the poets err-- because they were sometimes unimaginative in their handling of ideas. Milton's belief in Aristotle's misrepresentation³ of Plato's views has by no means disappeared. Burnet is scarcely less harsh a critic of Aristotle as an interpreter of Plato than Milton was.

...where Aristotle tries to develop the theories of God and the Soul which were the chief doctrines of Plato's later life, he in fact destroyed them altogether. No doubt he may seem to accept them verbally....

.....

It is obvious that this is a violent reaction against the Platonic theory.... The mere fact that the diurnal revolution of the fixed stars

³Platonism (1928), 121-122.

once more becomes of the first importance in the Aristotelian system marks it definitely as a revival of more primitive ideas than we have found reason to attribute to Plato in his later years.

Milton was fond of making fun of Aristotle for what he held to be the literalism of Aristotle's mind. He did so skillfully in De Idea Platonica (1628-1630),³ where he objects to Aristotle's literal interpretation of the archetypal man.

Haud ille, Palladis gemellus innubae,
Interna proles insidet menti Iovis.

...
Sive in remota forte terrarum plaga
Incedit ingens hominis archetypus gigas,
Et diis tremendus erigit celsum caput,
Atlante maior portitore siderum.
Non, cui profundum caecitas lumen dedit,
Dircaeus augur vidit hunc alto sinu....

Certainly he does not lurk, a twin of the virgin
Athene, unborn in the brain of Jove.

...
Or perhaps the human archetype is a huge giant, a tremendous figure in some remote region of the earth who lifts his head higher than the star-bearer, Atlas, to terrify the gods. Even in the depths of the soul of the Dircean seer, to whom blindness brought a profound illumination, no vision of him appeared. (11-12, 21-26)

It is well to keep in mind that for Milton ideas themselves are imaged forth as myths to men's minds and that, even when the extravagant conceptions sometimes attributed to Plato are disallowed, Plato remained for Milton "ipse fabulator maximus," "the supreme fabler yourself."

In the important Second Prolusion, "On the Music of the Spheres," Milton takes great pains to distinguish between

³Parker gives 1630-1632. Hughes says "somewhere between 1628 and 1630." Cf. LR I:152 & V:373.

error and the fables that the wisest men have used to image forth the truth. Notwithstanding his ironical treatment of Aristotle's literalism, and the fun he has at Aristotle's expense,⁴ Milton steers a straight course in his handling of the music of the spheres. Milton does not reject Pythagoras - what he does is refute Aristotle's conception of Pythagoras' view. He accepts Pythagoras' images of the heavenly harmony, but says that they were meant to be significations of unseen, unheard realities.

Sane si quam ille Sphaerarum docuit harmoniam, & circumactos ad modulaminis dulcedinem coelos, per id sapienter innuere voluit, amicissimos orbium complexus, aequabilesque in aeternum ad fixam fati legem conversiones.

Surely, if indeed he taught the harmony of the spheres and that the heavens revolved with melodious charm, he wished to signify by it, in his wise way, the very loving and affectionate relations of the orbs and their eternally uniform revolutions according to the fixed laws of necessity. (CE XII:150-151)

Apparently for Milton this harmony is a reality pertaining to both heaven and the skies. Milton makes no sharp distinction here between heaven as the eternal home of God and the universe which he has created. Probably he does not feel he has to because he holds that the harmony that is itself of God's own making applies to both these realms. But he is clear that men penetrate to a perception of both realms by understanding, not by visual sight. He says simply that images are the instruments for man's understanding of what he

⁴See especially E.M.W. Tillyard's introduction to Milton, Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises (1932), xxvi-xxviii.

cannot see and that the poets lead the way in imaging.

...in hoc cert vel Poetas, vel quod idem
pene est, divina imitatus oracula, a quibus
nihil sacri reconditque mysterii exhibetur
in vulgus, nisi aliquo involutum tegumento
vestitu.

...Certainly, in this he imitated either the poets
or, what is almost the same thing, the divine ora-
cles, by whom no secret and hidden mystery is ex-
hibited in public, unless clad in some covering or
garment. (CE XII:150-151)

Plato, he says, has followed Pythagoras, who could have
learned from Homer of this art:

Atque hanc deinque conspiracy rerum
univeesam, & consensum amabilem, quem
Pythagoras per Harmoniam Poetico ritu
subinduxit, Homerus etiam per auream illam
Jovis catenam de Coelo suspensam insigniter,
appositeque adumbravit.

And finally, this agreement of things universal
and this loving concord, which Pythagoras se-
cretly introduced in poetic fashion by the term
Harmony, Homer likewise suggested significantly
and appropriately by means of that famous golden
chain of Jove hanging down from heaven.

CM, XII, pp. 150-151.

It is not the reality of the harmony of the heavens, symbol-
ically presented to the mind, that Milton refutes, but the
literalism of Aristotle's reputed conception of intelligenc-
es, which, according to Milton, led Aristotle to err on his
understanding of the nature of harmony. Aristotle's concep-
tion of the gods is itself too literal, Milton says. He
jokingly says they would need all the harmony they could get
from Pythagoras to endure at all.

Annon aequum tibi videtur Aristoteles? nae ego
vix credam intelligentias tuas sedentarium illum
rotandi Coeli laborem potuisse tot saeculis
perpeti, nisi ineffabile illud Astrorum melos
detinuisset abituras, & modulationes delinimento

suasisset moram. Quam si tu Coelo adimas sane mentes illas pulchellas, & ministros Deos plane in Pistrinum dedis, & ad molas trusatiles damnas.

Does it not seem fair to you, O Aristotle? Truly, I hardly believe your intelligences would be able to endure with patience that sedentary toil of the rolling heavens for so many ages, unless that ineffable song of the stars had prevented your departure and by the charm of its melody had persuaded a delay. It would be as if you were to take away from heaven those beautiful little goddesses and should deliver the ministering gods to mere drudgery and to condemn them to the treadmill.

Milton immediately goes on to insert examples of the right way --the poets' way--of thinking about the heavenly harmony.

Hinc quoque Musarum circa Jovis Altaria dies noctesque saltantium ab ultima rerum origine increbuit fabula; hinc Phoebæ lyrae peritia ad longinqua vetustate attributa est. Hinc Harmoniam Jovis, & Electrae fuisse filiam reverenda credidit Antiquitas, quae cum Gadmō nuptui data esset, totus Coeli chorus concinuisse dicitur.

Thus also from the very beginning of things the story has prevailed about the Muses dancing day and night around the altar of Jove; hence from remote antiquity skill with the lyre has been attributed to Phoebus; for this reason the ancients believed Harmonia ought to be regarded as the daughter of Jove and Electra, whom the whole choir of heaven is said to have lauded in song when she had been given to Cadmus in marriage.

(CE XII:152-155)

He is saying that we cannot do better on earth than use symbols--visible signs of something invisible--to depict unseen realities. This early work is an able defense of fabling, of the use of artistic invention in order for the mind to free itself from error and ignorance.

The corruption of man's nature, Milton says, prevents him from knowing the harmony as it really is.

Quinimo aures nostras incusemus debiles,
 quae cantus & tam dulces sonos excipere
 aut non possunt, aut non dignae sunt.

Nay rather, let us blame our feeble ears which
 are not able, or are not worthy, to overhear
 the songs and such sweet tones.

(CE XII, 154-155)

Milton follows Hesiod and Horace in making Prometheus, the
 fire-stealer, "seem" to be the reason for man's disharmony;
 but it is men whose souls are so bent earthward that they
 fail to look or listen for the divine.

qui enim possumus coelistis illiussoni capaces fieri,
 quorum animae (quod ait Persius) in terras curvae
 sunt, & coelestium prorsus inances.

for how can those be susceptible of that heavenly
 sound whose souls, as Persius says, are bent tow-
 ard the earth and absolutely devoid of celestial
 matters?

(CE XII:156-157)

Milton then concludes with the passage in which he
 would lead men to aspire to the stars, at least in longing
 for the return of the golden age.

At si pura, si casta, si nivea gestaremus
 pectora, ut olim Pythagoras, tum quidem
 suavissima illa stellarum circumeuntium musica
 personarent aures nostrae, & opplerentur;
 atque dein cuncta illico tanquam in aureum
 illud saeculum redirent; nosque tum demum
 miseriarum immunes, beatum & vel Diis
 invidendum degeremus otium.

But if we possessed hearts so pure, so spotless,
 so snowy, as once upon a time Pythagoras had, then
 indeed would our ears be made to resound and to be
 completely filled with that most delicious music
 of the revolving stars; and then all things would
 return immediately as it were to that golden age;
 then, at length, freed from miseries we should
 spend our time in peace, blessed and envied even
 by the gods.

(CE XII:156-157)

Milton does not define here exactly what will bring man back
 to such a state of innocence. He is far less specific about

this than in Naturam Non Pati Senium, where God will presumably renew creation through a final fire. In this Prolusion he is closer to the closing conception in the Elegia Quinta that we still live in a "wretched world," where winter still brings back her endless nights. But there is even more the suggestion of the Elegia Tertia that man is "semideamque animam," a spirit that is half-divine. Although it may not be entirely Milton's intent to do so in the Prolusion--he leaves much unsaid--men seem to be called on much too simply to improve. He thereby strengthens the impression that the major sources of the thought are non-christian ones.

It is true that Milton could have cited biblical authorities for his conception that we must deal with things of heaven symbolically. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face," Paul wrote (1 Cor. 13:12). And the writer of Hebrews had added much to this, concerning both the law and faith itself.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near (Hebs. 10:1).

For the writer of Hebrews faith itself is a conviction of man's relationship with the unseen.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.... By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. Hebs. 11:1, 3.

Most significantly, perhaps, it is the unseen that Christ reveals as man's true home and that he makes accessible to them.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them.... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem' and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant....

Hebs. 12:18-19, 22-24.

Milton was probably encouraged in his early thoughts by such biblical conceptions. We know that he studied religion from an early age.⁵ Certainly the blending of earthly and heavenly realities, used in Hebrews to portray the heavenly Jerusalem, is similar to that which Milton employed so frequently. But to cite these possible biblical parallels as more than stimuli to thought would seem to me to be an act of special pleading here. Milton may have been encouraged by Christianity but he appears to me to have been all but controlled here by Greece and Rome. That is why this Pro-
lusion seems to me to be most closely related to works that come earlier than the Nativity Ode.⁶ Milton always drew on Greece and Rome as aids to thought. But up until the writing of the Ode in 1629, he was sometimes satisfied also with ancient conceptions of man's way of life, with no special concern for their relationship to Christianity. To be sure, Christian currents already coursed through the channels of his earliest works and sometimes determined the direction of

⁵ See Fletcher, vol. I, Ch. 16, & passim. Cf. LR I:95-96.

⁶ Cf. Tillyard, Correspondence, xxvi ff.

the thought. The Elegia Quarta and even In Quintum Novembris show that this is true. For the most part, however, Milton's early thoughts do not run in a single channel, as much as he was attracted by the beautiful and good and conscious of their opposites. The Elegia Prima, Elegia Quinta and Elegia Septima, along with the Italian poems remind us of this fact.

So in the references to Pythagoras' exemplary purity in the Second Prolusion, Milton seems to be satisfied with Plato's conception of human corruption as a state to be outgrown. This need not be alien to a Christian view, but I think it is alien here, insofar as Milton suggests that man by his own vision can be naturally inspired to outgrow the bad and come gradually into a purer state of good.

This interpretation may be placing too much emphasis on a few scattered lines. But the suggestions of this view are present in the poem, and the least that can be said is that in the question of corruption and the means necessary for man to gain some measure of good in harmony with heaven, Milton faced a problem he had not yet resolved.

At least he knew that error was no help to man and that the first step to be free from error is to give attention to the things that count. He made it abundantly clear that scholasticism was no such thing for him and that he believed its effect was to make fools of learned men. He speaks of this sharply in the Third Prolusion.

Sed nec minus infrugifera sunt, quam injucunda haec studia, & quae ad rerum cognitionem nihil prorsus adjutant.

.....
 Quandoquidem haec omnia, de quibus adeo efflictim, & anxie laboratum est, in natura rerum nullibi existunt, sed leves quaedam imagines, & simulachra tenuia turbidas oberrant mentes, & recioris sapientiae vacuas.

But these studies and those which add absolutely nothing to the knowledge of things are as fruitless as unpleasant.

.....
 Finally then, the whole fruit of the labor so earnestly performed will be that you emerge a more accurate simpleton, a manufacturer of trifles; and that there accrues to you as it were a more expert ignorance. It is not astonishing, since all these things, about which toil has been spent so tormentingly and anxiously, exist nowhere in the nature of things; but certain airy visions flit before minds disordered by trifling ideas and destitute of more accurate wisdom. (CE XII:164-169)

Milton belonged to the long and still living tradition of men who believe that the scholastics, with the literalistic latticework they were said to have made of heaven, were the farthest from reality in their thoughts. He even pursues his attack on scholasticism at the very time that he is called on to engage in scholastic argument. The real interest for the reader in the fourth and fifth Prolusions is Milton's attitude. So far as the need to prove his competence would allow, and even a trifle more, Milton used these two Prolusions as an opportunity to inveigh against the whole scholastic tradition which gave rise to such practices. The Fourth Prolusion especially shows Milton acting like an unbroken steed. Error, he says extravagantly, has so invaded the schools that Truth has fled the earth.

At vero citra dubium aufugit in caelum,
 patriam suam misellis hominibus nunquam reditura;

& jam totis in Scholis dominatur immundus error,
 & quasi rerum potitus est, non instrenuos utique
 & non paucos nactus assertores.

But there can in fact be no doubt that Truth has fled away to her home in heaven, never to return to hapless man; and now foul Error reigns supreme in all the schools, and has seized the power, as it were, with the help of a strong and active body of supporters. CM, XII, p. 174. Tillyard, p. 74.

Scholasticism, according to Milton, has made the riches of philosophy nauseating:

unde sane eo res deducta est, ut lautissima
 Philosophiae cupedia, ipsis quibus Superi
 vescuntur Dapibus non minus opipara, nunc
 suis conviviiis nauseam faciant.

The thing has come to such a pass that the richest dainties of philosophy, sumptuous as the feasts which the gods enjoy, now only disgust those who partake of them. (CE XII:174. Tillyard, 74)

Even though he is about to defend a scholastic thesis, he lets his readers know how little he values such disputes.

ab utro autem stet veritas, fortasse (ne vera
 dissimulem) non est operae pretium ea, qua
 expedit, industria explorare: quippe saepius
 de re perquam minimi momenti maxima inter
 Centurias philosophantium agitur contraversia.

But, to be quite candid, it may not be worth while to spend the trouble which is demanded in finding out on which side the truth really lies; for in fact it is very often about questions of the most trifling importance that the most heated disputes of the forces of philosophy occur.
 (CE XII:176. Tillyard, 74)

The telling point he makes is that so often no one can attach importance to the questions debated. He goes so far as to say openly in the course of his argument that:

Potui quidem, immo ac debui huic rei diutius
 immorari, ac profecto nescio an vobis, mihi met
 certe ipse maximopere sum taedio.

I might indeed I ought to have dwelt longer on this question. I cannot tell whether I have bored you, but I have certainly bored myself to extinction. (CE XII:184. Tillyard, 77-78)

One cannot help but hope that some of the authorities may secretly have applauded at this point. Milton himself, however, thought it wise to close his Prolusion with the words, "receptui canere," "to sound a retreat."

In the Fifth Prolusion Milton is more hopeful concerning the cause of truth and more generous toward men than he was in the preceding one. A lengthy consideration of the misfortunes of Rome, which he upholds as having been the ruler of the earth by divine decree in ancient times, leads him to hope that the ravages wrought by error in his own time will somehow be checked before truth is altogether overthrown. There are men who strive to rescue truth, he now admits.

Haec ego quoties apud me recolo animoque
colligo, toties cogito quantis viribus de tuenda
veritate certatum sit, quantis omnium studiis,
quantis vigiliis contenditur labantem ubique,
& profligatam veritatem ab injuriis hostium
asserere.

Whenever I consider and reflect upon these events,
I am reminded afresh of the mighty struggle which
has been waged to save Truth, and of the universal
eagerness and watchfulness with which men are
striving to rescue Truth, already tottering and
almost overthrown, from the outrages of her foes.
(CE XII:194. Tillyard, 81)

He is not complacent in the least, however, concerning the power that error wields. He pictures Error as a barbarian horde overrunning the best men's minds.

Nec tamen prohiberi potest, quin foedissima
colluvies errorum invadat indies omnes
disciplinas, quae quidem tanta vi aut veneno
pollet, ut vel niveae veritati suam imaginem

inducere valeat, aut sydeream veritatis speciem
nescio quo fucō sibi adsciscere, qua, ut
videtur, arte & magnis Philosophis frequenter
imposuit, & honores, venerationemque uni
veritati debitam sibi arrogavit.

Yet we are powerless to check the inroads which
the vile horde of errors daily makes upon every
branch of learning. Error has indeed, by fair
means or foul, gained such ascendancy as to be
able to impose its own likeness on the snow-
white form of heavenly Truth, and by I know not
what artifice to assume her similitude. By
this device, it seems, it has often deceived,
even great philosophers, and has laid claim to
the honours and reverence which are due to Truth
alone. (CE XII:194. Tillyard, 81-82)

Error is considered here to be an almost independent power
that men cannot easily control. There is a distinction made
between error and the one who errs. As a consequence, even
the philosophers are treated with fresh sympathy.

The Prolusion closes with one of Milton's few early ex-
plicit references to Truth as an independent power. Truth
has strength within herself to prove invincible against all
that error can do.

satis enim superque suo Marte valet ad
se defendendam invicta semper Veritas;
nec ad id alienis indiget adminiculis;
& licet nobis aliquando superari, & pessum
premi videatur, inviolatam tamen perpetuo
servat se, & intactam ab erroris unguibus;
in hoc Soli non absimilis, qui saepe involutum
se, & quasi inquinatum nubibus ostendit humanis
oculis, cum tamen collectis in se radiis,
totoque ad se revocato splendore
purissimus ad omni labe colluceat.

For invincible Truth has within herself strength
enough and to spare for her own defence, and has
no need of any other help; and though she may
seem to us at times to be hard pressed and beat-
en to the ground, yet she maintains herself ever
inviolated and uninjured by the claws of Error,
even as the sun, who often shows himself to human
eyes obscured and darkened by clouds, but then

drawing in his beams and gathering together all
his splendour, shines forth again in blazing
glory without spot or stain.

(CE XII:202. Tillyard, 84-85)

This is a poet's depiction of what Truth is like. It is based upon a Platonic conception of ideas which strongly influenced Milton, however much he came to give his own interpretation to such views. Here he affirms only that truth is an eternal reality with power within itself to remain secure. Error can cloud truth from men, but cannot touch truth itself. He was to deal in other places with the manner in which truth has its effect on men.

Milton seldom personifies truth as a separate entity in his early works. He almost always chooses to relate truth to the life of God or man. He makes truth a participant in the heavenly harmony or in the struggle of men to give truth earthly form. The reason for this is that Milton believed so strongly that truth has an effectual power. For Milton, the presence of truth is measured by its effectiveness on man. Truth had no cold forms in Milton's mind. It is scarcely too much to say that for him truth is the living language spoken by the soul when life goes well.

Nearly every reference Milton makes to truth states or implies that men must be "caught up" when truth is present. His principal objection to the scholastics is that their legal wranglings fail to move a man or to engage his interests where those interests count.

At vero fuitiles hae, nec non strigosae
controversiae, verborumque velitationes
in commovendis animi affectibus, certe
nullum habent imperium....

But these useless and really dry controversies
and verbal wranglings certainly have no power
to stir up the passions of the soul....

(Third Prolusion, CE XII:1 164-165)

"In commovendis animi affectibus," "to stir up the passions
of the soul" -one is reminded of the line in the Elegia
Quarta in which Milton says: "Et totum rapiunt me, mea vita,
libri," "And my books, which are my life, quite carry me
away."

The method men should use to decide upon the things
that count appeared self-evident to Milton. The principal
he applied unswervingly to determine what a man should give
attention to was whether or not it moved him, heart and soul
and mind and strength, to good. That is why he gave first
place to poetry - because "divina certe Poesis ea," poetry,
which is assuredly divine, he says in the Third Prolusion,

qua coelitus impertita est, virtute obrutam
terrena faece animam in sublime exuscitans,
inter coeli templa loct, & quasi Nectareo
halitu afflans, totamque perfundens Ambrosia,
coelestem quodammodo instillat beatitudinem,
& quoddam immortale gaudium insusurrat.

by that power which has been communicated from
heaven, rousing to high flight the mind, buried
in earthly dross, establishes quarters among
the temples of the sky; and, as though inspir-
ing with nectarean breath and besprinkling the
whole with ambrosia, instils in a measure heav-
enly blessedness and suggests a kind of immortal
joy.

(CE XII:162-163)

For Milton, the engagement of the mind with truth is a form
of love, which God himself inspires.

It is, however, an engagement man controls. Reason is

in all things man's sure guide. Even poetry must not be given unbounded credence, Milton says. So in the First Prolusion Milton tells us that the authority by which poetic statements must be tested is the norm of reason present in the mind.

...sed ea tantummodo ad normam rationis
revocare conor, exploraturus hoc pacto num
rigidae possint veritatis examin pati.

...but I attempt somehow or other to reduce these things to the norm of reason, being about to investigate in this fashion whether they can endure the test of strict truth. (CE XII:128-131)

To the test of reason in deciding on the truth or error of what men say, Milton adds the authority of eminent men. These are the tests he points to in the Fourth Prolusion.

hos ut sequar inclinatus animus, ab illis ut
longe lateque dissentiam tum ratione adductus,
uti opinor, tum etiam tantorum virorum
authoritate....

As I understand the problem, my mind is inclined to follow the latter, being led both by reason and, as I think, by the authority of great men to differ very widely from the former.

Reason itself, he seems to say, requires that we respect the minds of other men as well as our own. In fact, the Third Prolusion is partly an argument for men to seek out the best guides they can find to help them with the studies they pursue.

The Third Prolusion is even more, however, a statement of what studies should do for men and a guide to the subjects that do affect men's lives. Again, the principal which Milton applies in this Prolusion to determine the subjects that should engage men's minds is whether or not they move men's

lives to good. He really makes the process of learning an art analogous to the art of oratory. He first invokes as an aid to his own oration the counsel Cicero gave:

*in hoc scilicet partes Rhetoris sitas esse,
ac positas, ut doceat, delectet, & denique
permoveat.*

namely that the fundamental duties of an orator are first to instruct, secondly to delight and thirdly to persuade.

(CE XII:158. Tillyard, 67-68)

He then proceeds to state very nearly these same principals as arguments to be used against scholastic studies.

*At vero ut palam fiat omnibus, quam sit
aequum atque honestum quod suadeo, strictim
ostendam, & pro mea semihorula hisce studiis
nec oblectari animum, nec erudiri, nec denique
commune bonum quicquam promoveri.*

Now to make it plain to all how proper and reasonable is my theme, I will show briefly, in the short half hour at my disposal, that these studies promote neither delight nor instruction, nor indeed do they serve any useful purpose whatsoever.

(CE XII:160. Tillyard, 68)

To Cicero's principals of delight and instruction, Milton adds the principal that studies should serve a useful purpose. That he has not left out the principal of persuasion he subsequently makes most clear. In fact, the main argument advanced both against the scholastic studies and in favor of those studies Milton holds to be supreme is the effect they have on men.

The scholastic subjects afford no pleasure, he first says.

*Et certe in primis ad vos provoco, Academici,
si qua fieri potest ex mea vestri ingenii*

conjectura, quid, quaeso, voluptatis inesse
potest in festivis hisce tetricorum senum
altercationibus....

First I will issue a challenge, gentlemen. If I
can at all judge your feelings by my own, what
pleasure can there possibly be in these petty
disputations of sour old men....

(CE XII:160. Tillyard, 68)

Furthermore, the style itself gives no delight.

Nec materiam hanc enervem, languidam, &
humi serpentem erigit, aut attollit floridior
stylus, sed jejunus & exuccus rei tenuitatem
adeo conjunctissime comitatur, ut ego utique
facile crediderim sub tristi Saturno scriptam
fuisse....

And then this dull and feeble subject-matter,
which as it were crawls along the ground, is nev-
er raised or elevated by the ornaments of style,
but the style itself is dry and lifeless, so ex-
actly suited to the barrenness of the subject
that it might well have been composed in the
reign of the gloomy king Saturn....

(CE XII:162. Tillyard, 69)

He then turns abruptly to praise those studies which he says
do bring joy and meaning to men's lives. Poetry, divinely
inspired and rousing the mind to high flight, comes first,
as already noted. Rhetoric too captures the minds of men
and moves them pleasurably.

Rhetorica sic animos capit hominum,
adeoque suaviter in vincula pellectos
post se trahit, ut nunc ad misericordiam
permovere valeat, nunc in odium rapere,
nunc ad virtutem bellicam accendere, nunc
ad contemptum mortis evehere.

Rhetoric, again, so captivates the minds of men
and draws them after it so gently enchained
that it has the power now of moving them to
pity, now of inciting them to hatred, now of
arousing them to warlike valour, now of inspir-
ing them beyond the fear of death.

(CE XII: 164. Tillyard, 69-70)

Even history, as Milton conceives of it, has the power/to move:

Historia pulchre concinnata nunc inquietos
 animi tumultus sedat & componit, nunc
 delibutum gaudio reddit, mox evocat lachrymas,
 sed mites eas & pacatas, & quae moestae nescio
 quid voluptatis secum afferant.

History, skilfully narrated, now calms and soothes
 the restless and troubled mind, now fills it with
 delight, and now brings tears which bring with them
 a kind of mournful joy. (CE XII:164. Tillyard, 70)

These passages have the effect of poetry. They go beyond
 the requirements of an exercise. They emphasize the strength
 of Milton's conviction that the best kinds of studies have
 as their effect to move men deeply. The scholastic studies,
 he immediately goes on to say, have no such power to move.
 Instead, as already noted they make men fools and endow them
 with a more expert ignorance.

Milton then states explicitly what the passages on po-
 etry and rhetoric and history implied--that the test of any
 subject's worth is its effect on personal and public life.
 The most important consideration of all, he says, is the
 contribution studies make to morality and purity of life.

Caeterum ad integritatem vitae, & mores
 excolendos (quod multo maximum est) quam
 minime conducant hae nugae, etiamsi ego
 taceam, abunde vobis perspicuum est.

For the rest, even were I silent, it is amply
 clear to you how little these trivialities con-
 tribute to morality or purity of life, which is
 the most important consideration of all.

(CE XII:168. Tillyard, 71)

Finally, the effect of studies on public life follows from
 the effect they have upon men personally.

Atque vel hinc liquido evincitur quod mihi
 postremo dicendum proposui, scilicet importunam
 hanc logomachia nec in publicum cedere commodum,

nec ullo modo Patriae vel Honori esse, vel Utilitati, quod tamen in scientiis omnes antiquissimum esse ducunt.

From this obviously follows my final point, namely that this unseemly battle of words tends neither to the general good nor to the honour and profit of our country, which is generally considered the supreme purpose of all sciences. (CE XII:168. Tillyard, 71)

Milton goes on to say that moving speech and virtuous action contribute most to the enrichment of a nation's life.

Milton ends the Prolusion with an important passage designed to win his listeners from their scholastic studies to those studies which he believed were most important for men to pursue. He ranges broadly through geography, the arts, history, government, biological and physical sciences and astronomy, metaphysics, ethics and religion. He makes his thought attractively concrete by describing and illustrating the various subjects instead of naming them.

At quanto satius esset, Academici, quantoque dignius vestro nomine nunc descriptas chartula terras universas quasi oculis perambulare, & calcata vetustis Heroibus inspectare loca, bellis, triumphis, & etiam illustrium Poetarum fabulis nobilitatas Regiones percurrere, nunc aestuantem transmittere Adriam, nunc Aetnam flammigantem impune accedere, dein mores hominum speculari, & ordinatas pulchre gentium respublicas; hinc omnium animantium naturas persequi, & explorare, ab his in arcanas Lapidum & Herbarum vires animum demittere. Nec dubitetis, Auditores, etiam in coelos evolare....
immo Solem peregrinantem sequamini comites, & ipsum tempus ad calculos vocate, aeternique ejus itineris exigite rationem. Sed nec iisdem, quibus orbis, limitibus contineri & circumscribi se patiatur vestra mens, sed etiam extra mundi pomoeria divagetur; perdiscatque ultimo (quod adhuc altissimum est) seipsam cognoscere, simulque sanctas illas mentes, & intelligentias quibuscum post haec sempiternum initura est sodalitium.

How much better it would be, fellow students, and how much more worthy of your name, to make at this time a tour as it were with your eyes about the whole earth as represented on the map and view the places trodden by ancient heroes, and to travel through the regions made famous by wars, by triumphs, and even by the tales of illustrious poets: now to cross the raging Adriatic, now to approach unharmed flame-capped Aetna; then to observe the customs of men and the governments of nations, so admirably arranged; thence to investigate and to observe the natures of all living creatures; from these to plunge the mind into the secret powers of stones and plants. Do not hesitate, my hearers, to fly even up to the skies.... Yea, follow as companion the wandering sun, and subject time itself to a reckoning and demand the order of its everlasting journey. Nay, let not your mind suffer itself to be hemmed in and bounded by the same limits as the earth, but let it wander also outside the boundaries of the world. Finally, what is after all the most important matter, let it learn thoroughly to know itself and at the same time those holy minds and intelligences, with whom hereafter it will enter into everlasting companionship. (CE XII: 168-171)

That Milton was attracted to the new learning of his time has been well documented. But whatever his respect for the new science may have been, he closes his Prolusion with a reference to Aristotle, "who indeed has left to us almost all these things," Also, he has earlier called Plato "that best interpreter of Mother Nature." It is evident that the passage quoted above has a different function than to serve as a catalogue of courses to be undergone. "Oculis perambulare," to make a tour with your eyes, he begins, and even in translation the significance of the verbs soon makes itself known: travel, cross, approach, observe, plunge, fly up, behold, peer, follow, investigate, subject, wander, know, enter. Milton is proposing an adventure or series of adventures of the mind. The mind in its adventures must go out

and the subjects in themselves are useful ones. And yet the verbs suggest that what matters most is what happens to the mind in its activity: "ipsum tempus ad calculos vocate, aeternique ejus itineris exigite rationem," "subject time itself to a reckoning and demand the order of its everlasting journey." "Demand an order" is really the counsel that controls his thought, and the controlling order is the order of the mind itself.

Milton understood the need to choose, to select and make an order in the mind. The sequence and handling of the arguments in this Prolusion should make that plain. It is a kaleidoscopic, not encyclopedic, view of learning that he gives at the close of all his arguments. It is a sweeping view--a poet's view--of learning, the view of one who looks to learning primarily for what it lends to life. He was sympathetic to science, and he certainly was to insist that learning should be rigorous. Here, however, it is not a scientist but a humanist who speaks--one who believed that men should make an art of learning in order to be better able to make an art of life.

It is well to keep in mind that the Prolusions, by their very nature, constituted an intellectual attack and a defense. In all of them Milton demonstrates his capacity to be spirited, even to the point of being high-spirited at times and of going beyond the bounds of what was required of him in an exercise. For these reasons, some of the arguments, both pro and con, were doubtless overstressed. The harmless mock-

ery of his opponent in the First Prolusion, the ironical wit of the second, the broad satire of the Third, the hint even of burlesque in the main argument of the Fourth, the broad and sometimes low humor of the Sixth all serve to make it plain enough that these Prolusions were spoken with a college audience in view and that, whatever else he sought to do, Milton remembered that an orator should entertain. Then too, the demand on the listener to make what amounted to a theatrical "double-take" in following the argument of the second Prolusion, the dragging down of Aristotle in one speech, only to drag him in, half-seriously, for support in a later one, the extravagant claim that truth has fled the earth and that error reigns unopposed, followed in the next exercise by the flat statement that the cause of truth can never finally fail--all such instances give us notice that fireworks sometimes contributed to the display of light that Milton made in the Prolusions.

The surprising thing about them is that so much coheres. One leaves them with a sense that in some real measure Milton knew his mind. He really seemed to grasp what error can do to men and why it is that, in whatever form it takes it is a formidable enemy. Although his vision of truth and harmony seem less sure in the Prolusions than his perception of what error was like, his defence of them did not lack for zeal. It is, in fact, his spiritedness that most comes through. He recognized something of the wretchedness of life and something of the corruption in the hearts of men that

helps to make it so. But he had a high degree of faith that men can be inspired to grow. He felt that with the help of learning men have the power to make life pleasurable and yet true. In this he proved himself both generous and young.

Milton's spirited attitude and wide-ranging interests in the Prolusions help to emphasize a most significant point which, taken together, all the early works make clear: that Milton's early interests were quite normal ones, and that his responses to them were quite normal too. His beginnings were those which countless sensitive young people have shared: earth trusted, nature dearly known, love and friendship warmly felt, birth and death puzzled over, heaven glorified and religion art and learning devotedly pursued. What was unique was his capacity to be so caught up by each fresh subject that so fascinated him that he spoke as if he was within that subject's soul. He had a feeling for living as well as a fine sense for words. As a consequence, his words convey a sense of heightened normalcy which is as significant as his artistry in giving his works so much attractive power.

It is the quality of the thought that is important here. Milton thinks poetically. No one should confuse Milton's richness of expression with complexity. What breathes within his artistry is the simplicity and sensuousness and passion of his thought. It was the fundamental issues of our lives that held his interest, and all his senses were at work in his response. As a consequence, his thought was charged with emotion -- that rare kind of undemanding emotion that belongs

to someone who is drawn as if by love to what he sees and who must see something as it is before he comes to any conclusions of his own concerning it.

This directness, fair-mindedness and intensity of thought which Milton's early works display so prominently meant that Milton was eager to grow, as, fortunately young people usually are. To these qualities he brought one more attribute that, when it is present, gives youth so much strength: the attribute of certitude, however proximate it might prove to be. As much as his nature made him fair to what he saw, he had to commit himself wholeheartedly to what his judgment convinced him to be right or true. He had youth's great quality of loyalty, and even though the elegies and Prolusions yielded to pagan modes sometimes, the direction of Milton's deepest loyalties was never long in doubt. What moved his thought was the love of what delighted him and the alarm he felt at all that is the opposite of good. Milton was caught up wherever virtue shined or error and corruption clouded it.

Like any normal youth, Milton's great trust in the normal relationships of life gave him his great enthusiasm for the questions with which those relationships confronted him and led him to deal directly with these questions in his works. That is why they have such universal interest for us. The questions he struggled with are our questions too.

CHAPTER THREE

A SINGLE LOYALTY: THE NATIVITY ODE

A question that came to be of utmost concern to Milton was how a person's inevitable loyalty to nature and the world and art could be reconciled to his loyalty to God. This is that question of the divided loves or double loyalty that Milton expressed so poignantly in the concluding lines of the sonnet, Qual in Colle Aspro, quoted earlier. The question would have become more pressing as he became more conscious that the world by which a person was so much caught up could prove a deceiving and corrupting influence apart from God. Milton confronted this question and resolved it in a way that deeply satisfied him in his first major English poem, On the Morning of Christ's Nativity.

This would be a great poem by any standards. As the work of a youth just turned twenty-one, it was a triumph. It took great strength of mind--like the agility of an athlete--to work from one premise through so rich a body of thought with such passionate intensity and yet with such complete fidelity to logic. Everything worthwhile is given its place, an order is found for everything. No loss of affection for anything occurs, but a gain instead, as a consequence of something wonderful that has happened. The divine nature has united with earthly nature in one man--this is the event the

poem celebrates, and this is the one event that makes clear the order of all things. The poem does not celebrate the fact that God exists or that God ordains a universal order that his creation is expected to obey. It is the incarnate Christ whom the poem celebrates and it is the incarnate Christ who brings all things to see the place and order that they have. They are not just assigned a place by some divine decree; they are humbled to acknowledge what they are.

Nature, the world and art are not awed by heaven. A God in heaven is comparatively easy to deal with, and this kind of God had been naturalized long ago. In this poem the novelty for nature is the God who incorporates nature's being with his own. This is what confounds her so and causes her so much embarrassment that she is in a frenzy to cover her own parts and try to hide her present nature in the presence of this child. For in the infant Christ nature itself is pure, linked as it is with God in him. He is the one place where nature is purely itself, and in his presence the rest of nature can no longer conceal from anyone what it has become, the corruption of itself. It is the confrontation by its own long relinquished purity that so awes nature and so terrifies it. The child in whom this renewal of her nature takes place is the one to whom nature bows. That God can do this^{is} what makes him nature's God, and that the child is God present making nature whole inevitably makes the child nature's Lord.

The poem becomes, then, a confrontation of corrupt nature, corrupt man and corrupt gods by true nature, true man

and the true God, who are united now in the infant Christ.
 "This is the Month, and this the happy morn" Milton begins,
 as much as to say: Now Christ has entered time, now man's
 todays are different. Milton is very clear and precise concerning Christ's nature and work and our nature and condition. Christ is human and divine,

...the Son of Heav'n's eternal King,
 Of wedded Maid, and Virgin Mother born, (2-3)

His work is to free us from corruption and make peace real for us.

Our great redemption from above did bring;
 ...
 That he our deadly forfeit should release,
 And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.
 (4,6-7)

To help us, Christ

Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,
 And chose with us a darksome House of mortal Clay.
 (13-14)

There is no question of where we are found on that "happy morn" -- with nature, needing covering. Nevertheless the poems affirm that it is to us that God's Son comes.

Such an act by such a Lord calls for a gift of gratitude. It is ^{at} this point that Milton makes clear what has happened to his Muse. Art, and the poet's devotion to it, bow before this infant God. They are not silenced, but they are caught up.

Say Heav'nly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
 Afford a present to the Infant God?

.....

O run...

And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;

...thy Lord to greet,

And join thy voice unto the Angel Quire,
 From out his secret Altar toucht with hallow'd fire.
 (15-16, 24-28)

The poet's art, the hymn itself, is to become a greeting to this Lord and gain its inspiration from his "hallow'd fire."

"Winter wild" was the season of his coming, and he "All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies" (31). Throughout the poem the simplicity and lowliness and gentleness of all that pertains to the child and the heavenly bliss and peace he brings contrasts sharply with the ostentation and restless disorder of all that pertains to nature and man. To miss this would be to miss the meaning of the poem. At the sight of the "Heav'n-born child", nature, who hitherto has known only her "gaudy trim," is awed. Like Mary Magdalene, the sight of him makes her want to change her ways.

It was no season then for her
To wanton with the Sun, her lusty Paramour.
(35-36)

And like Adam and Eve, nature senses that she needs a covering, "To hide her guilty front with innocent Snow" (39).

But the search for a covering is a measure of despair taken by a nature that knows her "naked shame" and "sinful blame" and who is

confounded, that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities.
(43-44)

Nature is terrified because the purity of the infant's earthly nature exposes her present nature to be corrupt, makes it seem of no account any more, and potentially valueless. Such is nature's fear. But God is prompt to put this fear to flight. Despair, and the terror born of it, would be the right response to Christ's perfect nature if it were not that

God has done something to dispel despair in bringing Christ to birth. To put an end to fear, her maker sends down peace.

But he her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-ey'd Peace;

.....

And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal Peace through Sea and Land.
(45-46, 51-52)

Peace makes the difference - the peace that Christ provides. All is not changed but all is quiet now. Both the pride of self-striving and the fear of destruction at God's hand are silenced when peace comes. War is silenced by the presence of his peace, and even kings sense the difference that his coming makes.

No War, or Battle's sound
Was heard the World around,

...

And Kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.
(53-54 & 59-60)

To the trumpets of war and the thrones of kings is contrasted the quiet of the night in which this Prince came down.

But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of light
His reign of peace upon the earth began:
(61-63)

Even the wind calmed the water with its kiss, "Whispering new joys to the mild Ocean" (66). The stars were transfixed until he "bid them go;" contrariwise, the Sun (once the bearer of "the Day more excellent than Night,") was reluctant to come, "And hid his head for shame" (80). He saw that something had happened to make things different in the world, that now he would have to shine on a "new enlight'n'd world."

He saw a greater Sun appear
Than his bright Throne, or burning Axletree could bear.
(83-84)

The sun, nature's brightest self, knew he was not good enough to warrant such a Lord.

Ordinary men, however, had to be enlightened. They had no natural wisdom great enough to show them what was taking place on earth on such a day. Until it is revealed to men that Christ has come, Milton suggests, they idle their lives away, "simply chatting in a rustic row," preoccupied with their loves or their work, their foolish minds still unaffected by what the Child's coming does for them. So he says of the shepherds that

Full little thought they than,
That the mighty Pan
Was kindly come to live with them below;
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.
(88-92)

It should be noted that "the mighty Pan" is a reference to Christ as the Son of God come down to earth: that he chose a human form on earth and exercised his "might" there by the power of peace the poem makes abundantly evident. In fact, it is because of the way in which he has "kindly come to live with them below" that men are unaware of his presence until it is revealed to them by God.

Milton's mild remonstrance of the shepherds because of their inattentiveness implies an understanding and forgiving criticism of everyone's preoccupation with nature and love at the expense of God. The world has understandably distracted everyone, Milton implies. But at Christ's coming God brings down from heaven something that puts distraction out and makes the senses yearn to be attentive. He brings to men

a glimmering of the heavenly harmony that quickens them to rapt attentiveness.

In the poem this comes to the shepherds as the sound of the heavenly host rejoicing at the Christ-child's birth.¹ Milton assures us that it was a sound that reached the hearts as well as the ears of the listeners and that it was one that nothing mortal ever made.

When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet,
As never was by mortal finger strook,
(93-95)

The impression that this harmony made on men was so vivid that the earth continues to resound with a thousand echoes of its reality. Nature, and man as part of nature too, understood what this sound of harmony meant. Nature was

...almost won
To think her part was done,
And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
(104-106)

¹ Milton, of course, develops these stanzas on the heavenly singing from Luke 2:9-14, in which "an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" In his commentary on this passage, Hughes gives a helpful account of the various sources which influenced Milton's treatment of this theme (Minor Poems, 156-159).

The theme of music in the poem is a central one. Stapleton goes so far as to say that "the structure of the Nativity Ode may be looked upon, from one point of view, as an exploration of the contrast between the enchantment of deceit and the truth for which music is a sign" (221). What it is important to see along with this (for it markedly affected Milton's subsequent work) is that "Christ is the reason for the angelic music," so that "the incarnate Christ is not only the subject of his poem, but the source of his inspiration" (Barker, 177).

It seemed to nature at first sound as though there was no more need for her. That is why nature, including human nature too, is compelled to be attentive to the Child whose coming made it possible to hear such harmony. For nature--human nature too--knows without being told what value to place upon this harmony. Nature knows intuitively, as part of her nature, that

... such harmony alone
 Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union.
 (107-108)

Nature knows that this harmony is quintessential to her being. That is why nature bows so willingly before the infant Lord who brings so sure a promise that this harmony will be fulfilled for her. She knows she has to have this harmony to be herself. At Christ's coming man too becomes aware that he has to hear this harmony if he is ever to be whole. So Milton calls upon the "Crystal spheres" to "Make up full consort to th'Angelic Symphony" (132) The heavenly host, in other words, is still singing in the present time. When man hears this singing and hears the spheres of the created heavens ring out in harmony with it, then all created nature will be fulfilled.

For if such holy Song
 Enwrap our fancy long,
 Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold,
 And speckl'd vanity
 Will sicken soon and die,
 And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould,
 And Hell itself will pass away,
 And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

Yea, Truth and Justice then
 Will down return to men,

Th' enamel'd Arras of the Rainbow wearing,
 And Mercy set between,
 Thron'd in Celestial sheen,
 With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering,
 And Heav'n as at some festival,
 Will open wide the Gates of her high Palace Hall.
 (133-148)

All this is still to come. We still lack harmony, but the harmony we need derives from Christ and has a Christian function to fulfill. We do not yet hear this final harmony, but what we do hear is the "thousand echoes" of the first sound made by the heavenly host to human ears-- the sound of rejoicing that Christ was born on earth that first Christmas day. It is the sound the hymn makes, the sound of faith, that we can hear.

Up to this point in the poem Milton has been saying that with the help God gives them, men recognize Christ's Lordship already in his infancy, his coming, his incarnation, and bow to him there and know some measure of his peace. Everything corrupt remains corrupt, but the peace that comes in the presence of this child makes it clear that that which is corrupt is still accepted. Instead of being threatened with destruction, everything corrupt is given the hope that, through the power which the infant Christ possesses, it will be renewed and restored to its pure nature again.

What has happened is that Christ's coming makes it possible for everything created to come to its senses, see itself as it is, see in him its own long-forsaken purity of nature united with God, find its own hope for renewal in him and worship him as its Lord. Peace accompanies such recogni-

tion, such worship and such hope. This peace brings with it the sounds of promised harmony--a heavenly harmony dimly sensed by ears and heart. This dim sense of harmony awakens the living hope that this harmony will come to be earth's harmony as well. Now everything lives in the expectation that the harmony which the Christ child makes possible will be fulfilled. Man and nature join together in this hope. Christ, in making the coming of this harmony so sure, is revealed as nature's Lord and man's. It is of our nature to worship as Lord the one who makes so sure the coming of the harmony we need so much. Henceforth, everything that lives in the least rightly lives by this hope and bows to this Lord. This is the magnificent climax of the poem--that everything, even while it remains corrupt, consents to bow before this child and live by hope in him.

Such a conclusion might prove an easy one for some Christians to come to. But to make the coming of our necessary harmony depend entirely on Christ was a momentous conclusion for the youthful Milton to attain.² It meant the resolution of the double loyalty that so distracted him. We have seen in poems like the sonnet, Qual in Colle Aspro, how conscious Milton was of the cleavage caused by his own divid-

² Hanford noted that "the poem itself, as all critics have recognized, strikes a new note in the poetry of Milton" ("Youth," 123). Barker has indicated the force of this convincingly: "the recognition of the significance of Christ's incarnation and sacrifice recorded in the Ode was coupled with a recognition of the potentialities of a peculiarly complex poetical symbol, and...these recognitions together bestowed a new unity of feeling upon both Milton's thought and his art" ("Pattern," 170). It seems to me, however, less accurate to conclude that "the Nativity Ode resolves no pressing problems" (172). The pressure of the problems appears clearly manifest to me in the earlier poems.

ed loyalties. But the contrast between the Second Prolusion and the Nativity Ode reveals most sharply how complete a change took place in his effort to resolve this problem of man's double loyalty. In the Second Prolusion, Milton had already affirmed his conviction that man can only become whole again by recovering the heavenly harmony whose sound his own corruption made him lose. He had argued in the Prolusion for this harmony's reality.

At vero quidni corpora coelestia, inter
perennes illos circuitus, Musicos efficient
sonos?

Indeed, why should not the celestial bodies
during their everlasting courses evolve
musical sounds? (CE XII:152-153)

He had said that the reason we do not hear this harmony is that we are not worthy and are turned away:

Quinimo aures nostras incusemus debiles,
quae cantus & tam dulces sonos excipere
aut non possunt, aut non dignae sunt.

.....
qui enim possumus coelestis illius soni capaces
fieri, quorum animae (quod ait Persius) in
terras curvae sunt, & coelestium prorsus inanes.

Nay rather, let us blame our feeble ears which are
not able, or are not worthy, to overhear the songs
and such sweet tones.

.....
for how can those be susceptible of that heavenly
sound whose souls, as Persius says, are bent
toward the earth and absolutely devoid of celestial matters? (CE XII:154-157)

In this Prolusion the conception of the heavenly harmony, of our inability to hear it and of the means of which we should aspire in order to regain that harmony appear to be taken largely from the Greeks, as has been noted. We are not worthy; we must make ourselves worthy of this harmony, by means

of knowledge and improvement, as Pythagoras did. The harmony we need and the peace we aspire to seem in the Prolusion to be made contingent on our necessary self-attainment of purity again. If so, it must be evident at once how sharply the thought of this Prolusion contrasts with that of the Ode. In the Prolusion everything depends on being worthy and earth is considered an impediment. In the Ode, everything depends on Christ and what he is and does. He brings purity, he brings peace, he brings the promise of harmony to earth. Renewal comes first not by striving toward heaven but by bowing to the heavenly nature in union with pure earthly nature in one man. In this way peace comes to us and echoes of the heavenly harmony are already heard. Earth, the whole of nature, is not rejected but included in the expectation of the harmony to come. Nature and man are led toward fulfillment, not first by self-striving, but by humility - the humility of worship first of all. Worship becomes the one essential act for all nature and all men to make. Worship becomes the one act they are qualified for and the one act they are drawn to make: to bow before the Christ child as their Lord.

What is suggested by the poem is that, in contrast to the wanton actions rampant on the earth before Christ came, worship now becomes the first act a man must make in the presence of Christ--to bow to Him, and not to nature, love, antiquity or false gods--this, Milton suggests, is the Christian life at its fresh start.

Faith and worship are the beginning we can make in re-

sponse to the coming of Christ, the peace that he brings and the final harmony he promises. We would like it to be now that

...Heav'n as at some festival,
Will open wide the Gates of her high Palace Hall.
(147-148)

But we must accept the wisdom that ordains that this must not yet be so.

But wisest Fate says no,
This must not yet be so,
The Babe lies yet in smiling Infancy,
(149-151)

It is not enough to see that Christ came to men. One must also see why he continued with men and grew up among them, because he is the one

That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss;
So both himself and us to glorify:
(152-154)

The crucifixion is necessary to effect our redemption. This is the momentous event in Jesus' life, and through him in the life of all creation, by which both he and we together are glorified.

But the fulfillment of this glory must wait:

Yet first to those ychain'd in sleep,
The wakeful trump of doom must thunder
through the deep, (155-156)

The fulfillment will take place only when Christ appears again as Judge of all.

When at the world's last session,
The dreadful Judge in middle Air shall
spread his throne. (163-164)

Then we shall be caught up in the fullness of his heavenly harmony.

And then at last our bliss
Full and perfect is,
(165-166)

Nevertheless, our bliss begins right from the start of his first coming, and this makes all the difference for our present lives. We are not chained to error and evil any more. Our bliss is not perfect,

But now begins; for from this happy day
Th'old Dragon under ground,
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurped sway,
(167-170)

Evil, though still present, no longer holds our lives in thrall. The kingdom of evil is failing, because Christ has come and men and nature both know who he is. Now it is possible for men, and nature too, to live for him. Men no longer need to be deceived into following false gods, and nature need not be forced into their service. For at Christ's coming the false gods that so divided man were put to rout. This is the great fact that Milton celebrates in the concluding
3
section of his poem.

The Greek oracles, whom even Socrates had not despised, are dumb.

No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.
(174-175)

³On Milton's "horror of idolatry," see F. D. Maurice, 248. Maurice believed that Spenser and Milton "have done more to counteract the mischief of paganism and to vindicate the use of the treasures which it has bequeathed to us, than all the Apologists" (251).

Milton followed many previous Christian authorities in accepting Plutarch's account of the silencing of the oracles as proof that Christ's effective power over the pagan world began at his first coming. He caught in one line the actual sense of terror that we know the Delphic oracle evoked:

With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving. (178)
 Daiches suggests that in the line "A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament" (183) may be heard an echo of Rachel weeping for her children in Jeremiah's account (44). This^{is} a plausible and affecting possibility. Yet if we relate these lines to the picture evoked by the preceding stanza and think of the priestess in the terrifying performance of her rites, and envision her wailing when no answering sound is given to her, the image is a far starker and more troubling one.⁴

The picture softens as

The parting Genius is with sighing sent; (186)
 And yet, when the Roman gods of cities and households and the ghosts of the dead depart,

A drear and dying sound
 Affrights the Flamens at their service quaint
 And the chill Marble seems to sweat,
 While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat.
 (193-196)

The pictures are consistently those of forsaken shrines -- temples of futility and useless rites.

⁴ Murray sufficiently suggests what others have elaborated on concerning the oracles, p. 38.

Peor and Baalim
Forsake their Temples dim,

.....
And Sullen Moloch, fled,
Hath left in shadows dread
His burning Idol all of blackest hue;

.....
Nor is Osiris seen

.....
In vain with Timbrel'd Anthems dark
The sable-stoled Sorcerers bear his worshipt Ark.
(197-198, 205-207, 213, 219-220)

All worship, except the worship of the Babe who "lies yet in smiling Infancy," is emptiness. His is the power that drives the false gods out. So Osiris, the false god of creation,

...feels from Juda's Land
The dreaded Infant's hand,
The rays of Bethlehem blind his dusky eyn;
Nor all the gods beside,
Longer dare abide,
Nor Typhon huge ending in snaky twine:
Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,
Can in his swaddling bands control the damned crew.
(221-228)

That which is false and opposed to Christ knows that its power is being taken away.

The reference to the Infant's power to drive out the false gods is a gripping one. But it would be easy to oversimplify the method by which he is said to exercise his control. I believe that the reference to "The rays of Bethlehem" and to Typhon help to make the method clear. There is, of course, an allusion in the "snaky twine" and the "swaddling bands" to Hercules crushing the serpents in his cradle, but I do not think that the reference is intended to be interpreted as simply as that. In most accounts it was Zeus, the king of the Olympian gods, who vanquished Typhon with his

thunderbolts. In the light of this fact, Milton's reference serves to relate the Infant's power to his eternally effective Being as God's Son, sitting in "the midst of Trinal Unity" and having a "far-beaming blaze of Majesty." But that "Light unsufferable" he had "laid aside" to take on our humanity. As the incarnate Lord his heavenly influence was necessarily different--it was "the rays of Bethlehem" that blinded Osiris' eyes. I believe that this reference is intended to relate his incarnate power to the peace and harmony and heavenly light his coming brings about. For the poem had already established that his incarnate influence was exercised through the power of peace. It was "meek-ey'd Peace" that was said to calm nature's fears, and Peace that "strikes a universal Peace through Sea and Land." The heavenly hosts could now be heard because the Maker "sent down" Peace to still earth's feverishness. Peace prepared the shepherds and the earth to hear the "music sweet" from heaven and see in a "globe of circular light" the Cherubim and Seraphim "in glittering ranks with wings display'd." Peace and the angelic host all served the Infant Lord, and the suggestion given by the "rays of Bethlehem" is that it would have been both the sight of the incarnate Lord on earth and the universal peace and heavenly sights and sounds together that would have routed the false gods. Especially Typhon, Earth's offspring, the hydra-headed monster with the fiery tongues, capable of speaking at will in the voices of gods and men and beasts, who stole the thunder and the lightning that belonged to the

supreme god and shook the constellations of the sky. It was fitting that he should be the last of the ancient gods that Milton named. For Zeus had regained his stolen powers by having Cadmus play Pan's pipes and charm Typhon's hundred serpent heads until Zeus, rearmed, could strike him down. The reference to Typhon is so rich that there is even an inexact parallel suggested by the fact that Zeus had permitted Typhon to steal his power because he fell in love and thoughtlessly left the place from which he ruled: Milton's poem is all about what heaven had to cause to happen in order to help men who, god-like as they had been created, allowed themselves to be distracted just like Zeus had done. As the conceptions of the poem have been developed, I believe that what is meant is not only that the sight of the incarnate Babe would have caused consternation among the false gods but that the "myrtle wand" of universal Peace would have lulled the gods, the sounds of the heavenly hosts amazed them and the "glittering ranks" of heaven made them want to flee. Such is the Infant's correspondence with the heavenly powers suggested by the phrase "The rays of Bethlehem," and such is the way that Milton suggests "Our Babe" in "his Godhead true" can "control the damned crew."

Finally, the shadows depart with the setting sun and "Each fatter'd Ghost slips to his several grave" (234). The elfs leave their "Moon-lov'd maze," and earth experiences the peace of the incarnate Christ's first night. Our eyes are made to return from the dead luxuriance of the false gods

back to earth and to the holy simplicity of the mother and child.

But see! the Virgin blest,
Hath laid her Babe to rest.
Time is our tedious Song should here have ending.
(237-239)

This is where to leave the matter, Milton suggests, and where our sight is meant to hold--on the simple fact of the Christ-child's birth and on the correspondence of earth and heaven that his birth gives rise to. Stapleton has put it very well: "I think we can also say that the Nativity Ode as a poem is a moment of astonishment and is about a moment of astonishment... An event in time has occurred, and a poem has defined the intersection of its present with its futurity" (226). The simple sight of the Christ-child presented to the mind is intended to lead to that special kind of wonder known as worship.

What this simple faith in Christ that Milton found was to mean to him is made evident in his subsequent poems. Os-good (however much he may have gone on to oversimplify) spoke accurately of the significance of Christ for Milton's thought: "This simple faith of Milton transcended, controlled, and ordered, I believe, all his learning, even his elaborate theological and philosophical refinements. It was a synthesis which kept ever in control all the complex elements with which he worked" (86-87). To this must be related Hanford's earlier observation, that "the idea of future bliss held...an increasingly strong and glowing appeal to his imagination" ("Youth", 98-99). This is part of the reason why Barker is right in saying that, while the regard for harmony was typi-

cal of poets in Milton's century, "none of his contemporaries developed the idea and its varied associations with anything like the controlled complexity of the central passage of the Ode" ("Pattern", 176-177). It is this mere child and the power he brings, the power of peace sufficient for the things of earth to be graced now with some harmony, that are at the center of the sense of wonder that the poem conveys.

As the poem closes the eyes of our minds are led from the "sleeping Lord" to the eternal watchfulness of the heaven-sent light and powers that surround him.

Heav'n's youngest teemed Star

.....

Her sleeping Lord with Handmaid Lamp attending:
And all about the Courtly Stable
Bright-harness'd Angels sit in order serviceable.
(240, 242-244)

We are led to see how close to earth heaven is, where Christ is, even in the night. To look at him and at the powers that surround him, is to come to see that all creation has a single loyalty again. Now all man's powers, all that naturally interests him, all his loves are given their place in his fidelity to Christ. Only the false is to be cancelled out from life. Nothing good in life will be diminished. On the contrary, everything that God created good is to be caught up in bliss with man in Christ. Already at Christ's coming this bliss begins, so that everything that man has been devoted to finds its "order serviceable" in man's single loyalty to him. In the Hymn Milton celebrates in song Christ's coming and the peace he brings--the kind of peace that makes

men attentive to the power he brings to birth for them on earth.

This ode is an intensely Christian poem. At every point it is Christian convictions that control the thought. There is complete fidelity to the outlines of the Christian faith. Man is corrupt, nature is no longer innocent, the luxurious wantonness and evil of the whole creation is contrasted to the holy simplicity of the form heaven's help takes in coming to earth. In heaven Christ belongs to the "Trinal Unity"; on earth he is human but through the unconstraining influence of peace his eternal power remains effective and is revealed as an active harmony. A beginning of that harmony has been made real for men. It is now possible for man to be touched with "hallow'd fire." The false gods are put to flight; enough has been revealed for man to realize that their temples and their rites are empty ones and that worship now must center on one Child in whom heaven's Son unites with man. Although his coming brings peace and the sound of promised harmony and 'hallow'd fire' for men, along with the routing of the false gods, this true beginning serves a larger end-redemption and eternal bliss. That is not a beginning, not a work of Infancy but a work of Jesus' manhood at its earthly end. This one man's death on the cross redeems our loss, and its result is to glorify him and through him other men. Perfect bliss will come only with the second coming of Christ in his eternal glory as Judge, first to resurrect the dead and then to judge all mankind. But now bliss begins on earth with the worship

of the incarnate Christ and the power his life and death and glorification bring from heaven to influence all created nature.

The conception could hardly be more thoroughgoing or traditional. But to follow the common denominator of Christianity does not make that denominator a low one. It was, in fact, all but necessary to do so here in order to heighten the contrast between the Christian and non-Christian attitude toward the world and to focus attention on the poem's main purpose--the evocation of a sense of worship of the incarnate Christ as the means to heavenly grace and the resolution of all divided loyalties in him.

The development of the poem depends on two main conceptions: the mediated power of Christ and the renewed correspondence between heavenly and earthly reality, partly actual, partly a promise still to be fulfilled. The first conception is the controlling one: the poem depends for its force on a doctrine of the incarnation. The importance of the atonement is clearly stated, but it is presented alongside the main force of the poem as a qualifying event. This is as it should be for the purposes of the poem--since it deals directly with the birth of Christ, the poem naturally focuses on the incarnation and its consequences.

The doctrine of the incarnation had great force in much Christian theology. Many of the best Christian thinkers had shared Milton's conviction that the incarnation was an awesome fact in itself and that it had momentous consequences. He could have gained this view from many sources, not the

least of which would have been the Anglican Church. An early source of a developed incarnational theology was Irenaeus, in the second half of the second century A.D. Irenaeus' doctrine of the incarnation has remained a most influential one and from whatever source he may have received it, Milton's views very closely parallel those of Irenaeus on the most significant points.⁵

Irenaeus was among the early Church Fathers who emphasized man's fall and this, of course, made a doctrine of salvation necessary. For Irenaeus, salvation consists of release from Satan and attainment of immortality, and it can be seen at once how much Milton's poem depends on such a view, in the driving out of the false gods and the vision and promise of heavenly harmony men were given at Christ's birth. The purpose of the incarnation in Irenaeus' view was to restore to man the power to attain the goal of immortality. Irenaeus' explanation of how Christ brought this about is the controlling one in the development of Milton's thought in the Nativity Ode. Christ, in his union of the human and divine, was the one place where nature was perfectly restored, Irenaeus said. By what Christ was in his divine-earthly nature, by what he did in living and dying for us, and by acknowledgment of

⁵"Sources" in this study are intended primarily to help in understanding what Milton said. Milton and his readers would have been familiar with either the originating sources themselves or later developments of these at one or several points in the living history of the convictions of men's minds. Often we do not know whose elucidation of a doctrine made the vital impact on Milton's developing mind. But in seeking to understand Milton it helps to fructify our own minds when we look at some of the places where convictions which he shared with others were given the breath of intellectual life by some mind acting earlier than his. Cf. Whiting, Milton's Literary Milieu, 355 & 365-366.

his Lordship over all that is, man's purity and innocence is being restored and the attainment of immortality made possible. The conviction was to become of the utmost importance for Milton: that Christ makes possible for man the restoration of a lost immortal innocence of man and all creation being "recapitulated" as it were back into heaven.⁶

Irenaeus' most famous expression concerns Christ's love:

The Logos of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who on account of his great love became what we are that he might make us what he is himself."

(Adversus haereses, V. pref.)

This is certainly the controlling thought in the first two stanzas of Milton's poem. Irenaeus leaves no doubt of his belief that the change Christ brings about is to be real for us.

But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality unless first incorruptibility and immortality had been made what we were so that the corruptible might be absorbed by incorruptibility and the mortal by immortality and we receive the adoption of sons.

(Adversus haereses, III. 19:1)

Such a conception lies behind Milton's statement of how fallen nature feels in the presence of the pure nature of the child, as well as the change that men and nature become aware of at his coming.

Milton follows Irenaeus also in suggesting the importance of the vision of God which will make it possible for

⁶I do not mean to imply that the incarnation apart from the atonement effects redemption--neither Irenaeus nor Milton said that. The discussion of Irenaeus is derived largely from Kelly (147-149, 170-174), Bethune-Baker (129-133) and McGiffert, History (I:132-148). Cf. Aulen, *passim*. Since McGiffert's work was written scholars have given increasing recognition to the place of the atonement in Irenaeus' thought. As Kelly and others recognize, however, Irenaeus' view was influential in supporting and fostering the "Physical" theory of the atonement.

man to participate in God. Irenaeus writes:

It is impossible to live without life and the substance of life is participation in God. But to participate in God is to know God and enjoy his goodness. Men therefore shall see God that they may live, being made immortal by the vision and attaining even unto God. (Adversus Haereses, IV. 20:5-6)

That for Milton bliss already has its beginning here since Christ has come also follows what Irenaeus had said long before:

Now we receive a certain portion of his Spirit for the perfection and preparation of incorruptibility, little by little becoming accustomed to get and to bear God.

(Adversus Haereses, V.8:1)

Milton certainly drew on other sources than Irenaeus for his conception of the consort of the heavenly and celestial harmonies. But it is a purity of view akin to that of Irenaeus that prevails in Milton's poem.

As they that see the light are within the light and share its radiance so they that see God are within God and share his radiance. The radiance moreover vivifies them.

(Adversus haereses, IV. 20:5)

Milton however, keeps his eye fixed on the incarnate Christ and away from the mystical connotations of such thought. His conception of the heavenly harmony and the correspondence of the universe to it was derived from Augustine, who in turn was influenced in his thinking by non-Christian sources. It should be noted, however, that in Milton's poem the two forms of power which the incarnate Lord possesses correspond to his two natures: the power to bring peace to earth and the power, promised to man but possessed now only by the heavenly

hosts, to make eternal harmony.

The final effect of the poem is the sense of faith it conveys in the advent of God's Son and the effects his advent brings. On this point a sentence from Irenaeus could almost serve as a statement of Milton's underlying intent in the writing of the Ode:

As many as fear God and believe in the advent of his Son and establish the Spirit of God in their hearts through faith-such men as these shall rightly be called pure and spiritual and alive unto God because they have the Spirit of the Father who purifies man and raises him up to the life of God.

(Adversus haereses V. 9:2)

In Milton's poem too the worship of the incarnate Christ as Lord becomes the beginning of every fresh start in life, for man and all created nature. In him men find a renewed source of innocence.

From this point on in Milton's writings there was a change. The change was not a turning but a steadying. It is not that there were no previous signs of fidelity to Christianity. There had been more than signs, but there had not yet been a settled faith. Up to this time Milton had been led not only by the force of Christianity as he expressed it in such poems as the Elegia Quarta to Thomas Young but also by the force of nature to which such poems as the Elegia Quinta gave expression and, as the Italian poems voiced, by the force of love.

All this was normal and no one in his senses would have expected or wanted it to be otherwise. But now Milton seemed to need a single embracing loyalty. Perhaps he felt the need

to commit himself wholeheartedly to something, as some men do. Probably his deep love of the arts and of his God just had to be resolved somehow. "No man can serve two masters" Jesus had said, and he said it not as a platitude but as a fact that human nature feels. Milton was neither the first nor yet the last man to be deeply stirred by the sense of a genuinely divided loyalty. To pass by lesser men, we know that Jerome in the fourth century was so troubled by his love of Greek and Roman literature that he had a dream in which he was:

caught up in the spirit and dragged before
the judgment seat of the Judge.... Asked who and
what I was, I replied 'I am a Christian,' But
He who presided said, 'Thou liest, thou art a
follower of Cicero, not of Christ. For where thy
treasure is, there will thy heart be also.'

(Epistle XXII, 30)

The comparison of Milton with Jerome is brought to mind by the fact that as a literary writer "Jerome surpassed all his Christian contemporaries" and that "he was without question the greatest scholar of the age."⁷ (McGiffert, Vol. II, pp. 68-69).

There is no way of knowing whether or not the contemplation and writing of the Ode was the pivotal experience in the early focusing of Milton's faith. Probably it was simply the expression Milton was moved to give to a new dimension of his faith which other experiences had led him to. In any event, the consequences were most striking.

⁷ McGiffert, History, II:68-69.

Milton's subsequent works show a consistency of thought which suggests an assurance greater than any self-assurance might have given. There is, moreover, a pattern of progressive development in the subsequent expression of his thought. There is, finally, an unconstrained quality to these subsequent works, a quality that one associates with settled faith and that had not always been the mark of earlier works.

The change was anything but a tightening of spirit. On the contrary, one senses a movement in Milton from luxuriance to liberality in the expression of his thought. His thoughts grew more expansive as they became more controlled. It could not be said that he reigned himself in from anything but Christian interests, but it can be said that his works no longer expressed any sense of a divided loyalty. There is, in fact, much to suggest that Milton had come to experience what Luther called "the liberty of a Christian man." The spirit expressed by the Nativity Ode and other subsequent works suggests an author very close in thought to that of Luther in a passage of his work, Concerning Christian Liberty.

Nor are we only kings and the freest of all men, but also priests forever, a dignity far higher than kingship, because by that priesthood we are worthy to appear before God, to pray for others, and to teach one another mutually the things which are of God. For these are the duties of priests, and they cannot possibly be permitted to any unbeliever. Christ has obtained for us this favour, if we believe in Him: that just as we are his brethren and co-heirs and fellow-kings with Him, so we should be also fellow-priests with Him, and venture with confidence, through the spirit of faith, to come into the presence of

God, and cry, "Abba, Father!"⁸

Milton took a different course than Luther, certainly, but there is much to suggest that the motivating spirit became for him the same as that which Luther here gave expression to.

It is not that Milton made no further explorations in non-Christian thought--in many ways his thinking became bolder and more original. The difference was that he seems to have been set free in faith to explore. There was certainly no end yet to Milton's searching or to questions still left unresolved for him. But there was no longer any question of loyalty. Life and learning, however still perplexing, served his Lord. A settled faith became for him a fresh beginning, as it should.

The Elegia Sexta helps us understand the sense of a steadying influence that had come to Milton, the sense of dedication to which this gave rise and the liberality of spirit that became his own. The elegy is written with a warmth of spirit to which there has been added a special glow. He begins humorously:

Mitto tibi sanam non pleno ventre salutem,
Qua tu distento forte carere potes.

On an empty stomach I send you a wish for
the good health of which you, with a full
one, may perhaps feel the lack. (1-2)

And yet the contrast of the poem, between the Bacchic inspiration and the Bardic one, is already there. Diodati apparently has again been telling Milton to "adopt a holiday frame

⁸From Luther's Primary Works, ed. H. Wace & C. A. Buchheim (1896), as quoted in Fosdick, 86-87.

of mind" and write some cheerful verses about their affection for one another. But Milton is ready to counter Diodati now: he distinguishes his Muse from Diodati's and asks why his Muse cannot be allowed her freedom too.

At tua quid nostram prolectat Musa camenam,
Nec sinit optatas posse sequi tenebras?

But why does your Muse provoke mine, instead of permitting her to seek the obscurity that she craves? (3-4)

"Nec sinit", "not permitting"--freedom to choose one's course--this is the liberality of spirit Milton asks for and goes on to give.

Quam bene solennes epulas, hilaremque Decembrim
Festaque caelifugam quae coluere Deum,

How well you report the splendid feasts and the hilarious December--the festivals which do honour to the heaven-forsaking God. (9-10)

Milton is not about to denounce the festive spirit--his religious zeal was not fanatical. He knew that Jesus had gone to the wedding feast himself. He is even forthright in affirming that there is poetry that belongs to such a mood.

Quid quereris refugam vino dapibusque poesin?
Carmen amat Bacchum, Carmina Bacchus amat.

But why do you complain that poetry is a fugitive from wine and feasting? Song loves Bacchus and Bacchus loves songs. (13-14)

He cites numerous instances from the Greek myths and Roman poets to substantiate this view, and then proclaims of Diodati himself that:

Iam quoque lauta tibi generoso mensa paratu
Mentis alit vires ingeniumque fovet.
Massica foecundam despumant pocula venam,
Fundis et ex ipso condita metra cado.

In your case also the sumptuous board with its generous provision gives strength to

your mind and fire to your genius. Your
Massic cups foam with creative impulse and
you decant the store of your verses out of
the wine-jar itself.

(29-32)

"I am quoque", "in your case also"--among men, in other words,
there can be differences, and he is not going to be less
than generous to his friend. Of course, there must be more
than feast and wine: "Addimus his artes, fusumque per inti-
ma Phoebum Corda;" "To all this we add the arts and Apollo's
presence in your secret heart:" (33-34).

There must be art and inspiration too. In fact he reminds
Diodati that festivity must not be carried to extreme: "Et
revocent quantum crapula pellit iners," "And recall whatever
power dull dissipation drives away" (42).

Even festive song must keep its wits in hand.

He then gives personal testimony to the attractive pow-
er that inspires such song.

Crede mihi, dum psallit ebur, comitataque plectrum
Implet odoratos festa chorea tholos,
Percipies tacitum per pectora serpere Phoebum.
Quale repentinus permeat ossa calor;
Perque puellares oculos digitumque sonantem
Irruet in totos lapsa Thalia sinus.

Believe me, when the ivory key is played
and the festive throng dances through the

perfumed halls to the sound of the lute,
 you will feel the silent approach of Phoebus
 in your breast like a sudden heat that
 permeates to the marrow; and through a
 maiden's eyes and music-making fingers Thalia
 will glide into full possession of your breast.
 (43-48)

The powers that moved so strongly through Milton in the Elegia Quinta and Elegia Septima are not far from mind. He knew from his own experience that the "Elegia levis," the "gay elegy"... "vocat ad numeros quemlibet illa suos," "calls whom she will to her measures" (50).

There are those who have a right to be so stirred.

Talibus inde licent convivium larga poetis,
 Saepius et veteri commaduisse mero.

For such poets, then, grand banquets are
 allowable and frequent potations of old wine.
 (53-54)

There is nothing wrong, in other words, with festive art and gaiety. Milton's acknowledgment of this could hardly be more generous or less constrained. His loyalty is not such as to deny his own friend's loyalty or the good that it contains. The loyalty he has found permits of liberality. Its source, one must suppose, is most encompassing, the kind that leaves no kind of nature out.

But there is another kind of art with another inspiration and another function to fulfill--an art that demands that one should choose another way.

At qui bella refert, et adulto sub Iove caelum,
 Heroasque pios, semideosque duces,
 Et nunc sancta canit superum consulta deorum,
 Nunc latrata fero regna profunda cane,
 Ille quidem parce, Samil pro more magistri,
 Vivat, et innocuos praebeat herba cibos,
 Stet prope fagineo pellucida lympha catillo,

Sobriaque e puro pocula fonte bibat.

But he whose theme is wars and heaven under Jupiter in his prime, and pious heroes and chieftains half-divine, and he who sings now of the sacred counsels of the gods on high, and now of the infernal realms where the fierce dog howls, let him live sparingly, like the Samian teacher; and let herbs furnish his innocent diet. Let the purest water stand beside him in a bowl of beech and let him drink sober draughts from the pure spring. (55-62)

This is the art that sings of God and dedicated men. It needs another kind of drink and diet, but even more, it needs another kind of character.

*Additur huic scelerisque vacans et casta iuventus,
Et rigidi mores, et sine labe manus.
Qualis veste nitens sacra, et lustralibus undis,
Surgis ad infensos augur iture Deos.*

Beyond this, his youth must be innocent of crime and chaste, his conduct irreproachable and his hands stainless. His character should be like yours, O Priest, when, glorious with sacred vestments and lustral water, you arise to go into the presence of the angry deities. (63-66)

It needs the character of the Homeric bard.

*Sic dapis exiguus, sic rivi potor Homerus
Dulichium vexit per freta longa virum....*

So Homer, the spare eater and the water-drinker, carried the Dulichian hero through vast stretches of ocean.... (71-72)

The art of such a poet is a priestly art and he is inspired by God to sing.

*Diis etenim sacer est vates, divumque sacerdos,
Spirat et occultum pectus et ora Iovem.*

For truly, the bard is sacred to the gods and is their priest. His hidden heart and his lips breathe out Jove. (77-78)

"Priests forever," Luther had written, "a dignity far higher than kingship, because by that priesthood we are worthy to appear before God, to pray for others, and to teach one another mutually the things which are of God." Milton was ready to take up his option on that claim. He spoke of this in lowered notes to Diodati but with sufficient spirit to make it plain that he hoped "his hidden heart and his lips alike" would "breathe out Jove."

At tu si quid agam scitabere (si modo saltem
Esse putas tanti noscere siquid agam)--
Paciferum canimus caelesti semine regem,
Faustaue sacratis saecula pacta libris;
Vagitumque Dei, et stabulantem paupere tecto
Qui suprema suo cum patre regna colit;
Stelliparumque polum, modulantesque aethere turmas,
Et subito elisos ad sua fana Deos.

But if you will know what I am doing (if only you think it of any importance to know whether I am doing anything)--I am singing the heaven-descended King, the bringer of peace, and the blessed times promised in the sacred books--the infant cries of our God and his stabling under a mean roof who, with his Father, governs the realms above. I am singing the starry sky and the hosts that sang high in air, and the gods that were suddenly destroyed in their own shrines. (79-86)

His verses are gifts for Christ's birthday--gifts which, nonetheless, he feels were brought to him.

Dona quidem dedimus Christi natalibus illa;
Illa sub auroram lux mihi prima tulit.

These are my gifts for the birthday of Christ--gifts which the first light of its dawn brought to me. (87-88)

He closes, artfully enough, with a reference to simpler strains and with an expression of respect for the judgment of his friend.

Te quoque pressa manent patriis meditata cicutis;
Tu mihi, cui recitem, iudicis instar eris.
(89-90)

There can be no doubt about what Milton has confided to his friend. He himself, remember, had just turned twenty-one, and something had happened to make him a dedicated man. And his first act of dedication was a gift of song in worship of his Lord.

Diodati must have hesitated to give Milton counsel after he received the Elegia Sexta. Two songs, two influences, a festive and a sacred one, both good, Milton said. But he left no room for doubt that he had chosen his. And he made it amply clear to whom he turned first for inspiration and whose "priest" he was.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COUNTERPOINT OF LIBERTY: L'ALLEGRO AND IL PENSEROSO

Urged on by the zeal of a newly settled faith, it is not surprising that Milton should have begun by over-reaching himself. After he began to write The Passion, probably in Lent of 1630, he realized that he had tried to move too quickly in his faith. The direction of the movement was a logical one: from concern for Christ's incarnation in a human form to concern for the fact of his human death. Milton strove hard for simplicity of style to underscore the human quality of Christ's death. He knew this death had been a human reality and that no mythical images must be allowed to obscure that fact. He was, or tried to be, completely faithful to Christ's humanity.

And yet, as a poem, the fragment is a failure, perhaps even more so than the earlier poem, On the Death of a Fair Infant. In this fresh period of venturing, Milton sought to deal with the subject of death again, and there were as many thickets now for his thoughts to work through as there had been earlier when he became entangled with the theme of death. In neither poem was he master of his theme. In the earlier poem he had strained his images so exaggeratedly high as to say that if the infant niece had remained on earth she would have been able "To stand 'twixt us and our deserved smart." That poem had been a frenetic kind of failure of the mind. In

ly the first disciples must have felt the sense of "long out-living night" when they gazed at the Cross and placed Jesus in the tomb. But when they came to speak of this death they did not leave God out, any more than Jesus did when he said "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani." There was for them the sense of impending divinity. In their account even the taunt of one of the bystanders relates Jesus' death to the question of God's reign: "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Mark tells us that the centurion "who stood facing him" exclaimed at the moment of Jesus' death, "Truly this man was a son of God" (Mark 15:34, 35, 39).

One can only conclude that Milton was trying to be rigorously fair to the facts of Jesus full humanity, without having thought his way through to an interior grasp of what those facts implied. The poem contains nothing but references to Jesus' human nature and the poet's all too human exhibition of grief. Any sense of heaven's hovering presence is left out of sight, and the references to what Jesus' manhood and the poet's grief were like are both unwarranted and unconvincing ones.

Most perfect Hero, tried in heaviest plight
Of labours huge and hard, too hard for human wight.
(13-14)

The reference gives exaggerated emphasis to the heroism and gives no sense of the heaven-turned humility by which he gained a special kind of strength.

The line, "O what a Mask was there, what a disguise!"
(19),

is not a poetically compelling one, and suggests a confusion

in Milton's mind as to how to wed the manhood and the divinity of Christ.

The one really gripping line in the poem for me is that which poignantly expresses the sense of Jesus loyalty to men even in his death:

Then lies him meekly down fast by his Brethren's side.
(21)

Milton's conviction that this was so appears to me to be the reason why he strained so hard to see Christ utterly as man, although he lost his footing attempting to do so.

Grief is the only passion he allows Christ's human death to inspire in him. Here too there is a constraining effort to confine all response to Jesus' human death to a human dimension alone. There is no correspondence with the poet's grief on the part of heaven and earth. It is his "flatter'd fancy" that he calls on night to rouse to such a belief,

Befriend me night...

.....
And work my flatter'd fancy to belief
That Heav'n and Earth are colour'd with my woe....
(29, 31-32)

As a consequence, when he writes that his spirit "feels" it is carried to the towers of Jerusalem, the reader is made aware of the poet's consciousness that the "ecstatic fit" is self-induced.

There doth my soul in holy vision sit,
In pensive trance, and anguish, and ecstatic fit.
(41-42)

All he finds there is the tomb.

Mine eye hath found that sad Sepulchral rock
 That was the Casket of Heav'n's richest store,
 (43-44)

One wishes he had been less modest and that his vision had allowed him to arrive in time to view the Cross. But he has consciously ruled out this possibility and it would seem that with it he has ruled out the completion of the poem. "Grief is easily beguil'd" he wrote, and seems to have realized that "th'infection of my sorrows" was just that and that this infection had beguiled him into attempting such a poem. He left the imagined "race of mourners on some pregnant cloud" (56).

He saw that one cannot write of such a man as Christ in such a way and leave out of account the heaven and earth he came to join.

A Shakespeare might have penetrated inside the tomb to the sheer loss that Milton tried to celebrate. But it could not be done by leaving out Christ's spirit, or even the poet's spirit, as a man. True lamentation requires a more exalted grief than Milton attempted to give expression to.

Milton's failure should not make us unaware of his fidelity. There are reasons to believe that his attempt to deal with such a theme was in itself remarkable. That he passed by the crucifixion and chose to celebrate the fact of death itself suggests his own recognition that he could not yet satisfactorily wed in his imagination the incarnation and the atonement, the divine-human being and the actual death of the incarnate Lord. But that he tried to celebrate Jesus'

death tells us that he would not consent to leave out Christ's human nature or the stark fact of his death.

It would have been easy for Milton to do otherwise. A thoroughgoing doctrine of the incarnation does not lead one easily to deal with Jesus' death. In order to recognize this fact it is enough to remember the development of incarnation-al theories in the Eastern Church. Kelly writes that in the Fourth Century especially, "for a large part of the period the prevalent bias was towards what has been called the 'Word-flesh' type of Christology.... Making no allowance for a human soul in Christ, this viewed the incarnation as the union of the Word with human flesh, and took as its premiss the Platon-ic conception of man as a body animated by a soul or spirit which was essentially alien from it" (281). Even Irenaeus' own views formerly caused scholars much confusion on this point and more recently Gilson reminds us of Irenaeus' "materialism" (23). It is altogether likely that the stress which Milton placed upon the incarnation would have made it difficult for his imagination to come to grips with the fact of Jesus' death.

When we remember that in Milton's view the infant Jesus had brought peace and the sound of promised harmony and a bliss that "now begins" by his coming to us in an earthly form, we can see that a discussion of his necessary death would prove most difficult. If the incarnation was what brought man the power he needed to begin to be renewed, then death would not seem to be able to destroy the one who brought

such a renewing power. How then sing of the death of the incarnate one? It is hard enough to sing of the death of one whose "heroism" consisted of meekness and humility in perfect harmony of character with heaven. It is harder still to sing of the physical death of one whose first coming brought men the power to begin to be renewed in peace and bliss. That Milton wanted to do so appears to me to be creditable. That he could not do so in any but a "wooden" way puts him in the company of many committed Christians. He had tried to give meaning to a fact that was too big for him. He saw that he was not yet prepared to do this in a poem. Like most Christians, Milton had to rely upon an inexplicable fact in order to accept the consequences of Christ's atoning act.

But Jesus was not the only one whose humanity was stressed by Milton after the writing of the Nativity Ode. Something had happened to make him place renewed emphasis upon the human quality in man. He had done so before but he did it more prominently now. The poem On Shakespeare, the Hobson poems and the Epitaph on the Marcioness of Winchester all reveal this fact. Significantly, they are all forms of epitaphs. These poems were discussed earlier, but it is important to remember the quality they have. In all of them Milton circumscribes his thoughts concerning man, and yet along with the realism there is a sense of radiance. He acquiesces in the thought of death because he is so sure that it is no longer a final end to life. In all these poems there is the sense conveyed that human life depends upon a sure deliverance

and that man can find contentment not by self-striving but by being man. In The Passion, Milton strained to fashion an unlimited personal grief. In these other poems that also deal with personal death the grief is limited, a sense is given that those who die are cared for and that we can take pleasure in our memory of them as men and women and gain inspiration from their lives and work. Behind all these poems there is an unexpressed conviction that Christ is Lord over death, that his atoning act has its effect hereafter just as his incarnation brings some earthly lives the start of bliss. The poems derive from that kind of loyalty to which we give the name of faith.

Milton's steadied faith and the liberality of spirit this gave him led him to view these interests somewhat differently than he had done before the writing of the Nativity Ode. Faith can make one more in love with human nature and its interests and less enthralled by them. It would have been natural for Milton to experience a sense of unconstrained release toward all those interests which he had previously been attracted to so strongly that he had felt their influence as a compelling and dividing loyalty. In my judgment there is sufficient evidence in the Elegia Sexta and other poems written in the years immediately following the Nativity Ode to conclude that Milton did in fact experience a sense of such release in the attitude he took toward the world. There was no compulsion now in his interest in the world of men. He was free to look upon the world with gaiety.

This is what I believe he did in the spring or summer of 1630 after the Nativity Ode had helped him resolve his faith into a single loyalty and after the over-reaching effort of The Passion had been passed. L'Allegro and Il Penseroso appear likely to have been written at that time as a song of liberation in, not from, the world.

Although Hughes still dates these poems "1631 (?)," in his introductory remarks to his earlier edition of the Minor Poems he relates them closely to the Nativity Ode:

I have discussed them here before On the Morning of Christ's Nativity; not because I believe that they antedated that poem; but because it seems to me that they were virtually contemporary with it, and that we should regard the impression which they give us of Milton's personality as complementary to that given by his "birthday present to Christ." (xxviii)

This is a view which I completely share. The poems convey just such a sense of the poet's own "sweet liberty" in his relation to the world as that which would have been explained by the fresh access of faith that he expressed in the Ode. They have a freedom from constraint which even the Elegia Sexta, Milton's "proclamation of emancipation" to Diodati, did not have. The two poems form a counterpoint of delight in those pleasures which, at their best, make life such an attractive thing. They spring from an equitable temper freshly felt and which, in generous measure and for good reasons, had become Milton's own. Dr. Tillyard has observed some characteristics of the tone and temper of these poems which apply directly to this point.

The mood of the poems is one of an even serenity; not one of the ecstatic serenity

that can follow the assuaging of a mental upheaval. They are the work of a young man free for the time from the growing-pains and fevers of youth. We like L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as we like people when they are happy and tolerant; when they stimulate without exacting too much, do not disturb us by wanting sympathy or by springing fresh notions on us, and are content to enjoy the present.

.....

I fancy that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are the most popular of Milton's poems because of their subtle friendliness of tone.¹

Readers of Milton are deeply indebted to Dr. Tillyard for helping them place these poems prior to Milton's Horton² period and read them refreshingly with Everyman in mind. The opening lines of L'Allegro, however, seem to me to have a function that can be accounted for without bringing in what Brooks and Hardy call the "extrapoetic grounds" of having been written with a college audience in mind. The poems as a whole were written for some audience, of course, but I think that the opening lines of both poems parallel one another and that Milton had his reasons, intrinsic to the poems, for giving them the exaggerated tone which Tillyard remarks upon.

The opening lines of L'Allegro certainly appear to have been designed to shock the reader into refusing to take the discharge of melancholy altogether seriously.

¹The Miltonic Setting, 10-11. The best recent criticism of these poems which I have read is that of Rosemund Tuve, Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton (1957). She savours their richness without straining for profundity. Two critics who find "the notion of the alert man...stronger...than that of the cheerful or pensive man" are Allen (3-23) and Miss Tate (585-590).

²Hanford had given the mere suggestion in 1925 ("Youth", 132).

Hence loathed Melancholy
Of Cerberus and blackest midnight born,

.....
Find out some uncouth cell....

.....
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.
(1-2, 4, 10)

To me this sets the tone for all that follows. The playful overseverity of the opening lines suggests that there is going to follow an exaggerated preoccupation with the world's delights. That is what it seems to me that we are given.

But come thou Goddess fair and free,
In Heav'n yclep'd Euphrosyne,
And by men, heart-easing Mirth,
(11-13)

The contrast seems sharp enough to suggest an overstatement on both sides. It seems to me that Milton is suggesting that one should be caught up by the world's joys but not carried away by them. Milton's two poems do not have, for example, the haunting suggestion of the unsurpassableness of some of earth's choicest experiences which Keats' was to give in his "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern." "Happy and tolerant" seem to me just right to describe the kind of spirit Milton seeks to evoke by the poems. We are sometimes given choices: Mirth may be either the daughter of Venus and Bacchus,

Or whether (as some Sager sing)
The frolic Wind that breathes the Spring,
Zephyr with Aurora playing,

.....
Fill'd her with thee a daughter fair,
So buxom, blithe, and debonair.
(17-19, 23-24)

This is delightfully unserious. Then too, the poet (Everyman?) is coy with mirth:

And if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreprieved pleasures free; (37-40)

This early allusion to Marlowe's poem should not go unheeded.

The anthology of Mirth's delights is certainly attractive. They are, in fact, so pristine that one is made to wonder at the close if the poet could be bound to the possible commitment to Mirth (as it really is on earth) which he makes but so carefully qualifies:

These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.
(151-152)

Nevertheless, the attractions of Mirth are made so great that, for this reader anyway, the opening lines of Il Penseroso also strike a jarring note, related to the opening lines of L'Allegro as a major to a minor key.

Hence vain deluding joys,
The brood of folly without father bred,
.....
Dwell in some idle brain, (1-2, 4)

One wants to ask the poet how he dares to deal with joys in such a way after he has just described them so glowingly. And the answer the poem gives to such a question is: because he is not overserious.

The welcome given to Melancholy likewise appears purposefully overdrawn.

But hail thou Goddess, sage and holy,
Hail divinest Melancholy (11-12)

The contrast with the opening lines of L'Allegro could not be more complete. Melancholy's "saintly visage is too bright,"

and yet it is black that is given the double emphasis:

O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue.
Black, but such as in esteem, (16-17)

It is as much as to say that broad brush-strokes of the most contrasting colors are the order of the day.

Again, the gods are treated a bit light-heartedly:

Thee bright-hair'd Vesta long of yore,
To solitary Saturn bore;
His daughter she (in Saturn's reign,
Such mixture was not held a stain).
(23-26)

Significantly he met her "in secret shades"

While yet there was no fear of Jove. (30)

What is one to think when he immediately continues:

Come pensive Nun, devout and pure, (31)

I think of playfulness. It is unfortunate that the seventeenth century could not provide us with a recording of Milton's reading of such contrasting passages. There seems to be a deliberate overseriousness too when the poet says:

And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,
(167-169)

It would take a very melancholy man to find contentment with such garments and such housing.

Nevertheless, most of the actual pleasures of Melancholy are again most pure and the same question arises as to whether or not the poet on earth would ever quite expect himself to live up to the qualified commitment with which he ends:

These pleasures Melancholy give,
And I with thee will choose to live.
(175-176)

It seems to me that more significance should be attached to these allusions to Marlowe's and Raleigh's poems than has been done. Masson refers to "the pretty little poem by Marlowe" but draws no conclusions from the comparison.³ But I think that Milton wanted some conclusions to be drawn. After all, every reader of Milton's poems would have known these earlier poems almost by heart (especially young Cambridge men), and Milton could assume that some analogies would be drawn. Marlowe's poem, as is well known, was not altogether "pretty". The passionate shepherd was trying to win himself a mistress:

Come liue with mee, and be my loue,
And we will all the pleasures proue, (1-2)

He then goes on to catalogue his enticements:

And I will make thee beds of Roses,
.....
Fayre lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.
.....
If these delights thy minde may moue,
Then liue with mee, and be my loue.
(9, 15-16, 23-24)

Even if Milton had only alluded to Marlowe, the question would have to be asked as to whether or not he is suggesting that he is not of a mind to be seduced by the pleasures he finds so attractive. But Milton's closing lines in both of his poems actually parallel not Marlowe's lines but the answering lines of Raleigh's reluctant Nymph:

Then these delights my minde might moue
To liue with thee and be thy loue. (23-24)

³The Poetical Works of John Milton, I:135-136.

Milton gives more than a suggestion in his two poems, I think, that he had not forgotten some of what the Nymph replied in Raleigh's poem:

If all the world and loue were young,
And truth in euery Shepheards tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me moue,
To liue with thee, and be thy loue.
(1-4)

The parallel was not intended to be exact, but Milton emphasized it by repeating his allusions to Marlowe's and Raleigh's poems. I think he did so in order to help convey the thought that though he loved the world it could not prove to be everything that he wishes he could make it out to be. It could give pleasures, yes, but not quite so unalloyed as the poet wishes they could be. So they are pleasures to be entered into, but somewhat lightheartedly. The poet's idealization of delights is qualified. Johnson's assertion that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso go about the world as spectators is not entirely unjustified and, on the poet's part, not without design. The total effect is to suggest that one is really in the world but not entirely of it after all.

But Milton does not make such qualifications obtrude. The qualifications are present, but there is genuine affection for the pleasures he describes. What Milton offers is a picture of what man at his best can do with the world at its best, when he is relaxing in the enjoyment or the cheerful contemplation of his world. The poems are, in a way, a guidebook to man's leisure time. Their purpose is to make attractive the whole range of the world's flowering so that

men might be led at their leisure to make their own arrangements of the world's delights. As Brooks and Hardy have observed, they are not delights that "would deprive the protagonist of conscious choice and render him chosen rather than choosing" (134). They are presented in such a way as to suggest that Everyman retains within himself the power to choose. That men should do so was an integral part of Milton's conception of life. But that it is an activity that most men must limit to their leisure justifies the poet's qualification of the pictures that he drew. As badly as men need to make an art of leisure, it would not do for many to make it a way of life.

The remarkable thing is that Milton could write so lightly of pleasures that were really dear to him. He was not detached--Johnson went too far if he meant that--but it was as though he had become free to savor them, even to love, with no sense left that love has to be a possessive kind of thing.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: THE SEVENTH PROLUSION

Milton himself had found a deeper source of pleasure than just the world's attractiveness. He had begun to feel the kind of pleasure to which dedication can give rise--a kind that has no reason necessarily to leave other pleasures out. He expressed the pleasures that a dedicated life can find and the direction in which his dedication led him in a major work, In Sacratio habita pro Arte, the Seventh Prolusion (1632). The work is a defense of learning as the pursuit of happiness and an argument for man to make the highest use of leisure that he can. It both delimits and defines the conception of life that Milton had in mind. It brings together many of the strong interests and attitudes that he expressed in other works. However, it is most closely related to the earlier Third Prolusion, and to the sonnet, How Soon Hath Time and the "Letter to a Friend," of which the latter probably were written in the succeeding winter months. The Prolusion suggests a different kind of pleasure than L'Allegro and Il Penseroso had expressed. Those poems had portrayed leisure primarily as a recreation of the mind. Now the use of leisure becomes a means to make an art of life.

The word we usually translate as knowledge is given in Milton's Latin as Ars. He sometimes employs the word scientia, without capitalizing it, to mean knowledge, as in "summa supra

omnes scientia." He contrasts arts and sciences in the phrase "omnis artis, omnisque scientiae." And once or twice he speaks of Scientia in its capitalized form (the caps may have no significance), as in "Scientiae Inscitia, Arti Ignorantia." I would take Milton's usual use of the word Ars in this Prolusion to mean knowledge as mental skill--an ordering of knowledge of the arts. He is thinking really of a liberal education such as we refer to as an education in the liberal arts, as for instance in referring to a college of "literature, science and the arts."

The designation of knowledge or learning as Ars was an important one to Milton, even though he was not using it in any unusual sense. Four years before he wrote the Seventh Prolusion, Milton had written to Alexander Gill about the¹ important place he gave to a liberal education:

Equidem quoties recolo apud me tua mecum
assidua pene colloquia (quae vel ipsis Athenis,
ipsa in Academia, quaero, desideroque) cogito
statim nec sine dolore, quanto fructu me mea
fraudarit absentia, qui nunquam a te discessi
sine manifesta Literarum accessione, &
plane quasi ad Emporium quoddam Eriditionis
profectus. Sane apud nos, quod sciam,
vix unus atque alter est, qui non Philologiae,
pariter & Philosophiae, prope rudis & profanus,
ad Theologiam devolet implumis....

Indeed, every time I recollect your almost constant conversations with me (which even in this Athens, the University itself, I long after and miss), I think immediately, and not

¹Letter 3, dated "Cantabrigia, July 2, 1628."

without grief, what a quantity of benefit my absence from you has cheated me of,--me, who never left your company without a manifest increase and growth of literary knowledge, just as if I had been to some emporium of learning. Truly, amongstus here, as far as I know, there are hardly one or two that do not fly off unfeathered to Theology while all but rude and uninitiated in either Philology or Philosophy.... (CE XII:10-13)

The letter shows how much he valued literary knowledge and how he felt it came to him not just by studies but by another use of leisure, conversations with a friend. His early conception of what learning is like was a pliant one.

Even more important is the conviction he expressed in this passage of the letter to Gill that the study of literature and philosophy should either precede or accompany the study of theology. Such studies, he implies, prepare a person to deal competently with theology. This is a conviction with which most theological faculties agree today. That Milton held this view helps us understand what he was saying in the Seventh Prolusion.

For purposes of analysis the Prolusion really consists of five main parts: an exordium, which describes the importance of the subject to Milton personally; a long discussion of the contribution of learning to the happiness of the soul in its relationship with God; a discussion of what it is that learning contributes to the happiness of man in his relation to the world, first in his private life and then in his public life; a refutation of arguments that ignorance may advance; and, finally, a brief peroratio, in which he appeals

to his listeners to respond to his arguments.

He is honoured to speak to his listeners, he begins, but he is reluctant to do so because he is conscious that to speak well requires "a certain encompassing support" of all the arts and of all science.

nam quoniam ex Libris & Sententiis doctissimorum
hominum sic accepi, nihil vulgare, aut mediocre
in Oratore, ut nec in Poeta posse concedi,
eumque oportere, qui Orator esse merito &
haberi velit, omnium Artium, omnisque Scientiae
circulari quodam subsidio instructum & consummatum
esse....

because I have learned from books and from the opinions of the most learned men this, that in the orator as in the poet nothing commonplace or mediocre can be allowed, and that he who wishes deservedly to be and to be considered an orator ought to be equipped and perfected with a certain encompassing support of all the arts and of all science.

(CE XII: 246-249)

The orator and, significantly, the poet must have the kind of learning that encompasses their lives. But he is too young for this to be true of him, he says, and therefore he has preferred

longo & acri studio ad illam laudem veram
contendere, quam properato & praecoci stylo
falsam praeripere.

to strive earnestly after that true reputation by long and severe toil, rather than to snatch a false reputation by a hurried and premature mode of expression.

(CE XII:248-249)

The passage implies that Milton has already decided on oratory (the ministry?) or poetry as a career and that he has already come to that insight concerning the slow maturing of

²Technically, of course, there are four parts to such an exercise. See Fletcher, vol. II, ch. 12.

his "inward ripeness" which he was to express with such conviction in the sonnet, How Soon Hath Time.

He then gives his personal testimony as to the benefit of such use of leisure time. "Qua animi cogitatione & consilio dum aestuo totus indies, & accendor," "While I am wholly afire and ablaze every day with this plan and purpose of mind," he says,

nihil vero magis aluisse ingenium, &
contra quam in corpore fit, bonam ei
valetudinem conservasse erudito & liberali otio.

nothing has more nourished my ability and
conserved its good health, contrary to what
takes place in the body, than learned and
abundant leisure. (CE XII:248-249)

This expresses but intensifies the sense of a wholesome influence to be derived from well-used leisure which Milton conveyed in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso.

It is interesting to observe that "hos nocturnos Endymionis cum Luna congressus," "those nocturnal trysts of Endymion with the moon," are not frowned on here as they were to be in the "Letter to a Friend."

Hunc ego divinum Hesiodi somnum, hos
nocturnos Endymionis cum Luna congressus
esse crediderim; hunc illum duce Mercurio
Promethei secessum in altissimas Montis
Caucasi solitudines, ubi sapientissimus
Deum atque hominum evasit, utpote quem
ipse Jupiter de Nuptiis Thetidis consultum
isse dicatur.

This I have believed to be the prophetic
sleep of Hesiod, those nocturnal trysts of
Endymion with the moon, that retreat of
Prometheus under the leadership of Mercury
into the deepest solitudes of Mount Caucasus,
where he became the wisest of gods and men,
insomuch that Jupiter himself is said to have
asked his advice about the nuptials of Thetis.
(CE XII:248-249)

The spirit of this passage would seem to be closer to that of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso than to that of the somewhat soberer spirit of the "Letter to a Friend." Perhaps this adds a suggestion as to the sequence in which these works were written. In fact the passage which follows the above one seem to me to be a possible reference to the writing of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as being that "highest favor of the Muses" which he says he had been favored with the previous summer, that is, 1631.

Tessor ipse lucos, & flumina, & dilectas
villarum ulmos, sub quibus aestate proxime
praeterita (si Dearum arcana eloqui liceat)
summam cum Musis gratiam habuisse me jucunda
memoria recolo....

I myself invoke the glades and streams and
beloved elms of the farms, under which during
the summer just gone by (if it be permitted
to mention the secrets of the goddesses) I
recall to mind with pleasant memories that I
enjoyed the highest favor of the Muses....

If it is too much to consider "the highest favor of the Muses" to have been a poem, at least the passage indicates that the spirit in which the two poems were written had been granted him in the preceding summer.

It hardly seems possible that Milton could have been serious when he went on to say that disturbances to his studies had made him reach a point where he felt "that it would be better forget the Arts completely" ("satius esse vel omnes Artes dedidicisse.") I do not think that he was quite serious. This appears to be largely the product of exordial overstatement to engage his listeners interest--like Erasmus,

he no doubt had thought of defending ignorance in satiric fun, as the tone of the succeeding lines would suggest. Yet, in the light of sonnet 7 and the "Letter to a Friend," it seems likely that he was tempted to be serious. This is just the kind of dispiritedness that could be expected to trouble someone who has had such an intensification of faith ~~as the~~ as the Nativity Ode suggests and who has subsequently determined on a difficult way of life. A sensitivity to harassments, whether these are real or imaginary, often seems to accompany those who have been led by a surer faith to some clear resolve. Loyalty does not rule out the possibility that temptations will occur, and Milton enumerated enough of these in his "Letter to a Friend."

Milton skillfully goes on to incorporate a restatement of the proposition into his exordium:

proposuique in certamen ultra suos cultores
beatiore redderet Ars an Ignorantia?

which of the two, Knowledge or Ignorance,
would render its devotees the happier?

(CM, XII, pp. 250-251.)

It is well to remember that what is being debated in the Prolusion is the issue of happiness. Milton leaves no room for doubt on which side his loyalties belong.

jam haec non plane interruptio est, quis enim
interpellari se dicat, id laudando & tuendo
quod amat, quod approbat, quod magnopere
assequi velit.

Now this is clearly not an interruption; for who may call it an interruption when he praises and defends what he loves, what he cherishes, what he wishes with all his heart to pursue?

(CE XII:250-252)

There would certainly seem to be no lack of love on Milton's part for learning. It remains to be seen if in his own mind he had reconciled this love to something else. That he could have gained authority for such love not only from Plato's conception of the lover in the *Phaedrus* but from Christian thinkers whom Plato had impressed is attested to by Augustine.

Now let us inquire concerning this, what sort of lover of wisdom thou art, whom thou desirest to behold with most chaste view and embrace, and to grasp her unveiled charms in such wise as she affords herself to no one, except to her few and choicest votaries.

.....
Assuredly I have already made it plain that I love nothing else, since what is not loved for itself is not loved. Now I at least love Wisdom for herself alone, while as to other things, it is for her sake that I desire their presence or absence, such as life, ease, friends.

(*Soliloquies* I:22, vol. I:271-272.)

The parallel of this passage in Augustine with the conception of "life, ease, friends," which Milton had developed in relation to the form he gave to his own highest loyalty is an emphatic one. The consideration for his friends with which Augustine concludes the passage in the *Soliloquies* brings to mind the possibility that Milton's enthusiasm for his subject was inspired partly by a generous consideration for his listeners.

But what measure can the love of that beauty have in which I not only do not envy others, but even long for as many as possible to seek it, gaze upon it, grasp it and enjoy it with me; knowing that our friendship will be the closer, the more thoroughly conjoined we are in the object of our love?
(I:22, Vol I, p. 272).³

³ It would be of considerable help in understanding Milton's thought if someone would trace in detail the parallels between Milton's life and thought and Augustine's. Augustine

After acknowledging his love for learning, Milton proceeds to refer to the profusion of evidence in favor of learning and the need to make a selection from it all. The passage is an important one.

hac ego argumenti foecunditate nimia
 laboro, ipsae me vires imbecillum, arma
 inermem reddunt; delectus itaque faciendus,
 aut certe enumeranda verius quam tractanda
 quae tot nostram causam validis praesidiis
 firmam ac munitam statuunt....

I am oppressed by this excessive abundance of evidence; the supplies themselves make me helpless; the means of defence render me defenceless. Accordingly, a selection must be made, or certainly it would be more truly an enumeration of the things which establish our case than a discussion, fixed and fortified by many strong proofs. (CE XII:252-253)

When Milton here speaks of the necessity for selection of material to produce a discussion "firmam ac munitam," "fixed and fortified," he suggests that he had a parallel meaning in mind when he spoke earlier of the role of learning in an orator's or poet's life as "quodam subsidio instructum & consummatum esse," that is, support which is a certain provision and consummation of an orator's skill. He later goes on to say that not only encompassment but selection is the essence of the art of learning. It is wholeness of outlook, not encyclopedic knowledge, that he has in mind.

was deeply drawn to Plato and to Christ, and he was influenced by men like Cicero too. He too came to feel that he was led by God, through divine inspiration but not without spiritual turmoil and questionings, "to abandon fame and all the emoluments of the brilliant career" as a teacher, and choose what he had learned from Cicero and long believed to be the way to happiness but had not yet had the resolution to follow, a contemplative life. And, following this decision, he too had his "Horton" period of retirement for three years.¹ After this he spent a year in Rome and then lived in retirement again for 8 more years. (See A.C. McGiffert, A History of Christian Thought (1932), II:78-79).

He then proceeds with his main arguments. Only a colon separates his emphasis on the need for selection to fix and fortify the argument and his emphasis on the need to consider first what most contributes to that to which "omnes ferimur," "we all are hasting," -- "Beatitudinem," "blessedness." The translation given in the Columbia Edition rightly implies a concern with what this life contributes to man's eternal happiness, which is the subject of the first main argument:

nunc illud mihi unice elaborandum video,
ut ostendam quid in utraque re, & quantum habeat
momentum ad illam in quam omnes ferimur,
beatitudinem....

At this moment I perceive that one point
ought especially to be emphasized by me:
that I demonstrate what and how much weight
on each side may contribute to that state of
happiness toward which we all are hasting.
(CE XII:252-253)

The conception of eternal life as "beatitudinem," "blessed happiness," went back to Christ. The beatitudes all have eternal happiness in mind: "Blessed are you....Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." (Matthew 5:11-12.)

The Apostolic Fathers developed this conception of eternal blessedness, and often made knowledge one of its features. A.C. McGiffert, speaking of the Apostolic Fathers, says of them:

All of them agreed that salvation meant an
immortality of happiness. As Second Clement
puts it: "...let the pious not grieve if he
endure sorrow in the present; a blessed time
awaits him; he shall live above with the

fathers and rejoice throughout a sorrowless eternity. "... It is interesting that not infrequently knowledge is referred to as one of its blessings. First Clement speaks of immortal knowledge....(McGiffert, I: 89)

From these sources the doctrine of eternal happiness passed into Catholic and Protestant thought. Its attainment was the common Christian hope in Milton's day.

Milton then proceeds to set forth what he says that he believes to be recognized by everyone, that God has given man an immortal soul.

Notum hoc esse reor, Auditores, & receptum omnibus, magnum mundi opificem, caetera omnia cum fluxa & caduca posuisset, homini praeter id quod mortale esset, divinam quandam auram, & quasi partem sui immiscuisse, immortalem, indelebilem, lethi & interitus immunem....

I believe, my hearers, it is known and recognized by all, that the great Framer of the universe, although He had founded all other things on change and decay, had intermingled in man, beyond what is mortal, a certain divine breath and as it were a part of Himself, immortal, imperishable, immune from death and Destruction....

(CE XII:252-255)

It is necessary to emphasize here that this is a Christian conception of man. It is based first on two well known passages in Genesis:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.... (1:26-27)

--then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (2:7)

This conception of the imago dei was a commonplace of New

Testament thought. Even in a rather trivial context Paul appealed to it.

For a man ought not to cover his head, since
he is the image and glory of God....
(1 Cor.: 11:7)

In its most significant form, the New Testament usage of the imago dei was applied to Christ as the person by whom all men could be restored to God's likeness.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined
to be conformed to the image of his Son, in
order that he might be the first-born among
many brethren. (Rom. 8:29)

Paul's conception of regeneration and sanctification followed from this view of Christ as the "first-born among many."

...seeing that you have put off the old nature
with its practices and have put on the new nature,
which is being renewed in knowledge after the image
of its creator. (Col. 3:9-10)

The conception was of great consequence for the Reformation and for Milton. "It remains then that it is in respect of the mind or soul that we are made in the image of God,"

⁴
Zwingli concluded.

Milton then says of this immortal part of man that

postquam in terris aliquandiu tanquam coelestis
hospes, caste, sancteque peregrinata esset. Ad
nativum coelum sursum evibraret se, debitamque
ad sedem & patriam reverteretur....'

After it had sojourned spotlessly and chastely
on earth for a while, a guest as it were from

⁴The Library of Christian Classics (1953-1957), vol. XXIV, p. 60. Zwingli's discussion of the imago dei (59-68) contains many parallels to Milton's thought.

heaven, should wing itself upward to its native sky and should return to its destined mansion and native land. CM, XII, pp. 254-255.

This doctrine is essentially a Platonic one. The allusion is to the sojourn and flight of the soul heavenward which Plato gives in the Phaedrus. Milton has not followed Plato's conception in the Phaedrus as to the manner of the appearance of the soul on earth, but he does follow him in the conception of the soul's activity. To pick and choose this way, now taking biblical, now classical precedents, had long been a Christian habit of thought.

In one of the relevant passages in the Phaedrus Plato has Socrates say:

The wing is the corporeal element which is most akin to the divine, and which by nature tends to soar aloft and carry that which gravitates downwards into the upper region, which is the habitation of the gods. The divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness, and the like; and by these the wing of the soul is nourished, and grows apace....⁵

The conception was incorporated into Christianity at a very early date. Augustine, however, became the chief authority. Two passages from his first Soliloquy help us see how Milton would have been drawn to relate Plato's conception to Christian ones.

God, the intelligible Light, in whom and from whom and through whom all things intelligibly shine, which anywhere intelligibly

⁵ The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett, I:251.

shine. God, whose kingdom is that whole world of which sense has no ken. God, from whose kingdom a law is even derived down upon these lower realms. God, from whom to be turned away, is to fall: to whom to be turned back, is to rise again: in whom to abide, is to stand firm. God, from whom to go forth, is to die: to whom to return, is to revive: in whom to have our dwelling, is to live. God, whom no one loses, unless deceived: whom no one seeks, unless stirred up: whom no one finds, unless made pure. (Soliloquies, I, 3. Vol. 1, p. 260.)

The conviction that man has been deceived, that he must be stirred or caught up, and that he must be made pure to live a life with God--all these had entered deeply into Milton's consciousness. A further passage in Augustine's soliloquy shows how Milton's conviction of the soul's need to sojourn "spotlessly and chastely on earth for a while" had become part of the main-stream of Christian thought.

And do Thou command me, so long as I move
and wear this body, that I be pure and high
of soul and just and prudent, that I be the
perfect lover and perceiver of Thy wisdom and
worthy of Thy dwelling-place; and grant me to
dwell in Thy most blessed kingdom. Amen. Amen.
(Soliloquies, I, 6. Vol. 1, p. 262.)

After describing the formation of the soul by God and its activity in seeking to return to Him, Milton then draws his first main conclusion.

proinde nihil merito recenseri posse
in causis nostrae beatitudinis, nisi id
& illam sempiternam, & hanc civilem vitam
aliqua ratione respiciat.

Whence it follows that nothing can be recounted
justly among the causes of our happiness, unless
in some way it takes into consideration both
that eternal life and this temporal life.
(CE XII:254-255)

This was a view which still prevailed in Milton's day far

more than in our own. Even Francis Bacon, in his Advancement of Learning and other works, kept at least the corner of his eye on God. Milton's statement serves as an indication that, in his own mind anyway, he was not going to deal with human knowledge without at least a consideration of its indirect relationship with God. He believed that his love of learning was incorporated in his loyalty to God.

He then gives first place to the contemplation of man's relation to eternal life as the chief source of happiness.

*Ea propemodum suffragiis omnium sola est
contemplatio, qua sine administro corpore
seducta & quasi conglobata in se mens nostra
incredibili voluptate immortalium Deorum
aevum imitatur,...*

This is the sole contemplation, according to the judgment of almost everybody, by which our mind, without the aid of the body, remote and as it were wrapped up in itself, copies the eternal life of the immortal gods with an extraordinary delight. (CE XII:254-255)

The sources for such a point of view are innumerable, inasmuch as numerous philosophies and religions agreed with it. Although Milton would have obtained support for such a view from Roman and later non-Christian sources, the assumption can probably be made that it was the views of Plato and of Christian thinkers that prevailed with him. Milton may have had in mind statements which Plato (or Socrates) made in connection with the proof of the immortality of the soul. For example, in the Phaedo Socrates says:

*In this present life, I reckon that we
make the nearest approach to knowledge
when we have the least possible intercourse
or communion with the body.... (I:450)*

However, Milton is far more influenced here by Christian sources than by Platonic ones. The Christian view was that Christians are citizens of a heavenly world and not an earthly one. Along with other Puritans, Milton would have derived this idea from the Fathers of the early Church and from Augustine--as indeed from Jesus and Paul. He would have thought of the kingdom of heaven Christ was to bring as man's true home. This led many Christians to a pronounced otherworldliness, such as Milton suggests by the previously quoted passage in the Prolusion, which echoes similar statements made by Augustine. For example, in the first Soliloquy Augustine writes:

There is only one thing which I can teach thee; I know nothing more. These things of sense are to be utterly eschewed, and the utmost caution is to be used, lest while we bear about this body, our pinions should be impeded by the viscous distillments of earth, seeing we need them whole and perfect, if we would fly from this darkness into that supernal Light: which deigns not even to show itself to those shut up in this cage of the body, unless they have been such that whether it were broken down or worn out it would be their native airs into which they escaped. Therefore, whenever thou shalt have become such that nothing at all of earthly things delights thee, at that very moment, believe me, at that very point of time thou wilt see what thou desirest. (I. 24, Vol I, p. 273)

I quote this passage purposely because it points out the extremes to which Christian thought could go and makes it obvious that Milton had a far more normal and, I would say, wholesome point of view on this subject. Augustine himself did not adhere to just this view. The view itself, as Augustine presents it, is very much in the spirit of Plato's Phaedo,

however, . Milton himself eschewed these more extreme positions of Plato and Christian thinkers too.

For Milton, the imago dei already had its effects in man's life here on earth. Its chief effect was to draw man now to contemplate the eternal life which he would have in the kingdom of heaven to come. But Milton proceeds to insist that this contemplation must be not only a consideration of eternal life but of temporal life as well. In fact, there is no pause in his sentence concerning the delight of the contemplation of eternal life and his assertion that

quae tamen sine arte tota infrugifera est
& injucunda, imo nulla.

This, however, without knowledge is altogether sterile and joyless, yea, indeed, worthless.

(CE XII:254-255)

This reference to knowledge could apply only to the contemplation of eternal forms, and in part it is meant to do just that. The thought remains consistent through the following sentence, which begins with a rhetorical question:

Quis enim rerum humanarum divinarumque ideas
intueri digne possit aut considerare, quarum
ferme nihil nosse queat, nisi animum, per artem
& disciplinam imbutum & excultum habuerit....

For who can contemplate and examine seriously the ideal forms of things, human and divine, of which nothing can surely be known, unless he has a mind saturated and perfected by knowledge and training.... (CE XII:254-255)

"Per artem & disciplinam"--there is no thought just of philosophia here, nor in the following portion of the sentence with its reference to Artes.

ita prorsus ei cui Artes desunt, interclusus
esse videtur omnis aditus ad vitam beatam....

So, in short, for one who lacks knowledge every approach to a happy life is seen to be cut off. (CE XII:254-255)

Milton is intentionally causing his listeners' attention to double back. He is not going to limit his thoughts to philosophy with Plato or even to theology with men like Augustine. He is not going to leave out the world of good God made. He is, in fact, concerned in the Prolusion with the eternal realm only as it gives meaning and direction to the things of time.

Milton certainly understood what he was doing. He did not forget nor fail to value Plato's thought. He certainly kept in mind Plato's doctrine of the ideal forms as Plato had developed these in the Phaedo, the Republic and the Timaeus. His references to the soul in this Prolusion were affected by conception such as that which Plato expressed in the Republic:

But to see her (the soul) as she really is, not as we now behold her, marred by communion with the body and other miseries, you must contemplate her with the eye of reason, in her original purity; and then her beauty will be revealed,..... (Republic X, 611. Vol. I, p.869)

He would have understood not only from Plato but from Augustine or those who followed him that reason is the consultant of the soul. So Augustine wrote in his work, Concerning the Teacher:

But, referring now to all things which we understand, we consult, not the speaker who utters words, but the guardian truth within the mind itself, because we have perhaps been reminded by words to do so. Moreover, He who is consulted teaches; for He who is said to reside in the interior man is Christ, that is, the unchangeable excellence of God and His everlasting wisdom, which every rational soul does indeed consult.

...
 Indeed when things are discussed which we perceive through the mind, that is, by means of intellect and reason, these are said to be things which we see immediately in that interior light of truth by virtue of which he himself who is called the interior man is illumined, and upon this depends his joy.

(XI & XII. Vol. I, pp. 394-395.)

Milton did not reject such conceptions of the interior light of reason or the soul's need to employ that reason to help her move back toward her eternal home. And yet, Milton doubles back more insistently than Plato or Augustine to the temporal world. It would be wrong to say that Plato or Augustine failed to value the good this world could give. But Milton relies upon its good far more than they did. In doing so he shared a partial inconsistency of thought with many other Christian interpreters who relied upon non-Christian sources to aid their Christian thought. An inconsistency required of them perhaps as much by observation as by insight. To understand this it will be necessary to proceed somewhat further with Milton's presentation of his views in the *Prolusion*.

After affirming the need for knowledge to aid the soul in its contemplation of eternal forms, he calls on creation as one of his chief arguments to prove that knowledge is the prerequisite of happiness.

*Circumspicite quaquam potestis universam
 hanc rerum faciem, illam sibi in gloriam
 tanti operis summus Artifex aedificavit; quanto
 altius ejus rationem insignem, ingentem
 fabricam, varietatem admirabilem investigamus,
 quod sine arte non possumus, tanto plus
 authorem ejus admiratione nostra celebramus,
 & veluti quodam plausu persequimur, quod illi
 pergratum esse, certum ac persuasissimum habeamus.*

In whatever way you are able, ponder over this entire scheme of things: the illustrious Artificer of the great work has built it for His own glory. The deeper we investigate its extraordinary plan, its remarkable structure, its wonderful variety, which, without knowledge, we cannot do, the more do we honor the Author of this with our reverence and, as it were with a certain approbation, do we strive to follow what we believe is very pleasing, true, and altogether acceptable to Him. (CE XII:254-257)

The passage has so many parallels that it would be hard to stop. Certainly the great affirmative Christian spirit of praise of the Creator is dominant. It was shared by numerous Christians probably in all periods of Christian history. Augustine spoke of the glories of creation redoundingly in the City of God:

How can I tell of the rest of creation, with all its beauty and utility, which the divine goodness has given to man to please his eye and serve his purposes, condemned though he is, and hurled into these labors and miseries? Shall I speak of the manifold and various loveliness of sky, and earth, and sea; of the plentiful supply and wonderful quality of the light; of sun, moon, and stars; of the shade of trees.... (XXII:24. Vol II, pp.650-651)

And yet Augustine was not primarily controlled by such convictions, magnificently as he could elaborate them. Another passage is perhaps more typical:

God alone is to be loved, and all this world, that is all sensible things, are to be despised; but they are to be used as the needs of this life require.

De moralibus ecclesiae catholicae (I:20(37).)

Calvin was closer to Milton's thought than Augustine.

In his Institutes he writes:

Whence we conclude this to be the right way, and the best method of seeking God; not with

presumptuous curiosity to attempt an examination of his essence, which is rather to be adored than too curiously investigated; but to contemplate him in his works, in which he approaches and familiarizes, and, in some measure, communicates himself to us.... Wherefore it becomes us also to apply ourselves to such an investigation of God, as may fill our understanding with admiration, and powerfully interest our feelings.

Calvin can even refer to Augustine in support of this view:

And, as Augustine somewhere teaches, being incapable of comprehending him, and fainting, as it were, under his immensity, we must take a view of his works, that we may be refreshed with his goodness. (I:9. Vol. I, p. 72).

Calvin, however, was no more consistent than Augustine had been. After affirming this to be "the right way, and the best method of seeking God," he cannot accept this as a settled view:

But, notwithstanding the clear representations given by God in the mirror of his works, both of himself and of his everlasting dominion, such is our stupidity, that, always inattentive to these obvious testimonies, we derive no advantage from them. (I:9. Vol. I, p. 73)

Milton accepted the world, and the conceptions of non-Christian thinkers, more openly than others sometimes did. He had a wide view of the access Christ made possible for men. I suspect that Milton was as moved by the revived interest in science as by convictions derived exclusively from Christian or classical sources when he spoke of creation's "extraordinary plan, its remarkable structure, its wonderful variety." Milton, however, does not assert that sense experience is valuable in itself. That, he goes on to say, would be ignorance itself. Will you believe, he asks,

nihil inesse tam multiplici fructuum
herbarumque proventui, praeterquam fragilem
viriditatis ornatum? Profecto si tam injusti
rerum aestimatores erimus, ut nihil ultra
crassum sensus intuitum persequamur, non modo
serviliter & abjecte, sed inique & malitiose
cum benigno numine egisse videbimur; cui per
inertiam nostram, & quasi per invidiam titularum
magna pars, & tantae potentiae veneratio
penitus intercidet.

that nothing inheres in such a manifold
increase of fruits and herbage, except a perishable
adornment of verdure? Really, if we should
be such unfair valuers of things that we
follow nothing but the low inclination of the
senses, we shall seem to be driven, not only
slavishly and humbly, but also wickedly and
maliciously, by the benign power; to whom,
through our sluggishness and as it were through
our ill will, a great part of the honors and
the reverence due so great a power will entirely
perish.
(CE XII:256-257)

The mind, in other words, must make its own reflection on
the matter which nature gives. It is not necessary to go fur-
ther than the quotation already given from Calvin's Institutes,
in which he in turn refers to Augustine, to see the Christian
antecedents of such a view.

Milton then proceeds to give a summary conclusion to this
portion of his thought.

Si igitur dux & inchoatrix nobis ad beatitudinem
sit eruditio, si potentissimo numini jussa &
complacency, & ejus cum laude maxime conjuncta,
certe non potest sui cultores non efficere vel
summe beatos.

If therefore knowledge be for us the guide
and introducer to happiness, if commanded and
approved by a most powerful divinity and
combined especially with his praise, certainly
it is not possible for its devotees not to
attain unto a high degree of happiness.
(CE XII:256-257)

The thought of the whole section is Christian. And yet it
would never have existed in the form it does without the con-

siderable influence of non-Christian sources. Of such sources Plato is the prominent one. The Phaedrus, the Phaedo, the Republic all can be seen to have been influences, but it is from the Timmaeus that the main Platonic influence here derives. This is the dialogue in which Plato speaks of the creation of the world and of its ordering by the artificer. He had reached a state of mind in which he looked upon the world as good. The world is a copy of the eternal, he concludes.

Every one will see that he must have looked to the eternal; for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes. And having been created in this way, the world has been framed in the likeness of that which is apprehended by reason and mind and is unchangeable, and must therefore of necessity, if this is admitted, be a copy of something.

(28. Vol. II, p. 13)

Plato elaborates this view to make the world "the moving image of eternity." Man, by reason of his immortal soul, has his place in this world. He is to prepare to reascend to the stars by the right use of his mind, which alone can make right use of the faculty of sight.

The lover of intellect and knowledge ought to explore causes of intelligent nature first of all.

.....
 God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed; and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries. The same may be affirmed of speech and hearing: they have been given by the gods to the same end and for a like reason.... (28. Vol. II, pp. 27-28)

There seems little question that such conceptions, presented in such a form, had deeply influenced Milton's thoughts at this time. Nevertheless, I think it could be shown that as Plato's thought develops in this work, he runs into complexities which Milton left behind. The influence of Plato was of a selective kind.

The controlling influence upon Milton's attitude toward the non-Christian world was probably that of Paul as given in Acts.

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for

'In him we live and move and have our being';
as even some of your poets have said,

'For we are indeed his offspring.' (Acts 17:22-28)

Probably no other New Testament passage was more important in the history of the relation of Christian to non-Christian thought than this one in Acts. In every age men have gone back to it for help and reinterpreted it. It is of cardinal importance in understanding Milton's sense of freedom in his use of non-Christian sources of his thought.⁶

⁶The doctrine of the Logos or Word active throughout all creation further sanctioned this recognition of truth in non-Christian writers. The Apologists developed John's doctrine

How selective Milton could be in his use of sources is shown by the passage which follows his summary on knowledge as the sure guide to happiness. The knowledge approved by God must lead to happiness, he had said. But he feels obliged at once to qualify this view. To be happy in our contemplation, he goes on to say, we must be upright in our characters, and admittedly learned men have sometimes been impious. Therefore virtue, he says, must accompany contemplation:

Neque enim nescius sum, Auditores, contemplationem hanc qua tendimus ad id quod summe expetendum est, nullum habere posse verae beatitudinis gustum sine integritate vitae, & morum innocentia....

For I am not unaware, my hearers, that this contemplation, by which we strive toward that which ought to be highly desired, can have no flavor of true happiness without uprightness of life and blamelessness of character.... (CE XII:256-259)

Now either Milton has been shifting his ground as to the efficacy of learning, or else he was not so close to Plato's and even Augustine's thought in the earlier passages as one might have supposed him to be. After all, when it comes to contemplatio, for Plato, and in part for Augustine, to know is to be, or rather, to know is to be becoming--that is, knowledge of the truth gives rise to character. Socrates had said just this in the Protagoras. Virtue is wisdom, he had said, and whoever is not virtuous is ignorant. In some respects Plato's much later view in the Timaeus is analogous

of the Logos and applied it in this way, as can be seen most clearly in Justin Martyr's works. See J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (1958), 96-101. But Milton's view is close to that of Zwingli here. See, e.g., A.C. McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant (1911), 65-66. For a Puritan view contemporary with Milton see that of John Preston, summarized in William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (1938), 168-172.

to this, for in forming the soul to be immortal, the gods have made man in such a way that by following the order given by his soul man will be good. According to Plato it is by faithfully copying the ideal forms, as he was intended to do, that man upholds the immortal nature of his soul.

Yet Milton does not here draw on such arguments. Instead of saying that knowledge which is Ars is bound to produce good character, he has to say that when sapientia is added along with ars, a man so endowed "may be sufficient to reform a whole state." The important point to note is that up until this time he has not referred to knowledge as sapientia. He has said that "sine arte," "without art" contemplation is altogether sterile and joyless. He has asked who can contemplate the ideal forms unless his mind "per artem & disciplinam imbutum & excultum habuerit," "has (been) saturated and perfected by knowledge and training?" He has said that "eruditio" guides and introduces us to happiness. He has been concerned, in other words, not with sapientia but with ars, as he himself certainly knew very well. I would go so far as to say that he has been consciously inconsistent, employing a conception of knowledge which did not coincide with that which Plato used in developing his doctrine of contemplation of the eternal forms. This is the very epitome of

⁷The fact that the same kind of problem led to a logical inconsistency in Plato's thought has been illuminatingly discussed by Lovejoy on pp. 52-54 & note 8, p. 337, of his book. Cf. Windelband, pp. 121-122 & 125. More recently Wild interprets Plato to mean both practical and theoretical knowledge by sophia and phronesis (pp. 16-17 & note 43). But Plato's use of the term techne, which Wild discusses on pp. 45 ff., as distinct from sophia, appears to be similar to Milton's dis-

that partial inconsistency of thought which has been referred to earlier as being a characteristic of many Christian interpreters who employed non-Christian sources in developing their thought. Milton was not defending sapientia, wisdom, as a means to happiness but ars, an ordering knowledge of creation as given by God. There is no question but that there is here an inconsistency of thought. Milton's concern throughout was simply to relate the knowledge of creation, as ars, to eternal ends. He did not care to count the philosophical cost. It was as much as to say that if God had made creation it was good to deal with in itself, but that in dealing with it one should know that God created it. Plato in his way and Augustine in his were far more rigorous in demanding that knowledge in itself should lead to some higher form of good.

Milton does not hesitate to agree with the view that knowledge of arts and science concern the intellect while virtue concerns the will.

At vero, Auditores, hoc in Philosophia
raturum, & antiquum esse satis constat, omnis
artis, omnisque scientiae perceptionem solius
intellectus esse, virtutum ac probitatis domum
atque delubrum esse voluntatem.

distinction between ars and sapientia. Windelband gives a useful summary of Plato's division of knowledge, pp. 105-107. Cicero's definition of sapientia, which Bush calls "the watchword of the humanists," is discussed by Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism (1939), 58-59. But Milton's own distinction between ars and sapientia is quite clear.

But truly, my hearers, in philosophy this appears to be sufficiently established and of long standing, that the perception of all art and of all science concerns only the intellect, but the home and the temple of the virtues and of uprightness is the will.

(CE XII:260-261)

Theories of the will, and of the relationship of will to intellect were numerous in both Christian and non-Christian sources. There were certainly those who said that virtue is a consequence of the right use of intellect or of the direct intuition of divine ideas. But the kind of distinction Milton makes was the predominant one. Primarily there were differences of emphasis or of an insistence, or the refusal to insist, that the will was not free to function without grace, at least in matters pertaining to salvation. It is all but evident that Milton upheld the freedom of the will, as had countless earlier Christians, such as Lactantius and Irenaeus. But even those like Calvin, who denied the freedom of the will, agreed that once man was influenced by God's grace the will had power to make virtue real in man.

Not only was there very common agreement as to the relationship of will and virtue but also as to the close relationship between intellect and will which Milton goes on to describe.

Cum autem omnium iudicio intellectus humanus
caeteris animi facultatibus princeps &
moderator praeluceat, tum & ipsam voluntatem
caecam alioqui & obscuram suo splendore temperat
& collustrat, illa veluti Luna, luce lucet aliena.

Since, however, in the judgment of all, the human intellect, as head and ruler, surpasses in splendor the other faculties of the mind, it governs and

illuminates with its splendor the will itself,
 otherwise blind and dark, that like the moon
 shines with another's light. CM, XII, pp.260-261

It was virtually the judgment of all that this was so. Yet Milton did not place upon the supremacy of intellect the checks and balances, founded in the divine will, that other Protestants, including even Zwingli, were inclined to do. The Reformed tradition of Protestantism stressed the power of the will and said that the intellect clarified, and sometimes codified, the responses that the will must make to God. Milton was sufficiently influenced by the strong Protestant emphasis on the will, especially with Augustine's authority behind it, not to insist on the absolute priority of intellect over will or to suggest that virtue should be regarded as a quality or consequence of intellect alone. Yet he clearly shows his preferences when he says of the intellect: "*& deinceps in aeternum excellentiam & claritudinem, majestatemque divinae proximam facile sibi asserit,*" "and finally it easily takes to itself forever preeminence, renown, and majesty almost divine." But here again Milton's preference for intellect over will does not appear to me to depend primarily on his obvious interest in Plato's thought but first of all on a more ordinary human affection for creation and an interest in its place in the life of man. One cannot read this section of the Prolusion, with its repeated stress on knowledge as Ars, without the genuine pleasures of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso and the firmly oriented dedication of the "Letter to a Friend" recurring to mind. Pleasure comes

from choosing well, Milton will go on to say in the Prolusion--as if will and intellect must always be considered as coordinates.

Only the sense which Milton conveys of cherishing the action of the intellect gives any distinctiveness to such a view. For it is important to remember that the Christian humanists and Protestant theologians agreed with the scholastics that reason and knowledge were important in the life of man. They all gave different interpretations of the relation of God to man which made such knowledge serviceable, but all used it. Luther and Calvin certainly greatly circumscribed the usefulness of knowledge but both acknowledged that its potential usefulness was given by God and renewed⁸ by Christ.

With his avowal of the preeminent majesty of intellect, Milton brings the first main section of his argument to a close. He has spoken of the contribution of knowledge, Ars, to that contemplation of the eternal nature which brings lasting happiness. In doing so, however, he has said that such knowledge begins to bring happiness in the present time, if it is combined with uprightness of life and blamelessness

⁸ See The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I:294, for a quotation of Aquinas' views on this matter. The underlying similarity of Duns Scotus and Aquinas on the relation of will and intellect is noted by McGiffert, History, II:299-300. His excellent summary of Protestant emphases, including a contrast of Zwingli with Luther, in his Protestant Thought, 70, shows the Reformed insistence on the preeminence of God's will and the place of human knowledge in understanding it.

of character: what men can already have is "verae beatitudinis gustum," "the flavor of true happiness." In other words, there can be already a beginning of blessedness. The conception conforms very much to the conditions brought about for man by the incarnation of Christ, as presented in the Nativity Ode. The grace of virtue given to the will is distinguished from the insight granted to the intellect, and neither virtue nor insight are considered to have the effect of deifying man. Since God created nature, to have a genuine affection for this and to be like Him in some effectual measure in doing so is, for Milton, "beatitudinis" enough for now. Such a conception of learning is strongly ethical yet dependent upon man's relationship to God. It largely accounts for Milton's great sense of freedom in turning his mind upon an ordering knowledge of the world, just as a similarly motivated attitude made him free to turn his attention unconstrainedly upon the pleasures set forth in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso.

It is with man's life within this world that the second main section of the Prolusion begins. "Age descendamus ad civilem vitam, quid in privata, quid in publica proficiat utraque videamus," "come, let us proceed to the state. Let us observe both what takes place in private and in public life." (CE XII: 260-261) The opening conception is a most pleasant one. It rests upon the understanding of Ars as literary studies, the insight and artfulness of living that a liberal education may bestow. Such Ars, he says, proves a

benefit to man in every period of his life, and at the end of life it was what the Romans most desired to prepare them for a life among the gods. "Taceo de arte," "with respect to knowledge," he says:

Praetereo & illud multos apud suos nobiles,
etiam P. R. principes post egregia facinora,
& rerum gestarum gloriam ex contentione &
strepitu ambitionis ad literarum studium
tanquam in portum ac dulce perfugium se recepisse;
intellexere nimirum senes praestantissimi jam
reliquam vitae partem optimam optime oportere
collocari; erant summi inter homines, volebant
his artibus non postremi esse inter Deos;

I omit this also, that many among their nobility, even the leaders of the Roman people, after extraordinary deeds and the glory of things accomplished, betook themselves out of the strife and din of ambition to literary study as though into a harbor and charming place of rest; that is to say, the most distinguished old men then perceived that the remaining best part of life ought to be invested in the best manner. Highest they were among men, yet in these arts they did not wish to be lowest among the gods. (CE XII:260-263)

Milton here gives great color to his real conception of eternal blessedness. Ars, which gives man gracefulness and strength of life, delights the gods. The whole delightful passage does not convey the sense of man aspiring to take wing by contemplation of the ideal forms, or even of the copies of these forms, in order to ascend among the gods. It is the sense of sheer delight with earth and of the transplanting of earthly delights to heaven in a purer form that is conveyed. It is contentment with creation and God's plan for it that shapes this view. Man on earth can make an art of life. He is given, one would like to say, the possibility of human "grace to use it so." To study the arts--this is how

to invest "the remaining best part of life...in the best manner." This is how to seek immortality, so that one will not be "the lowest among the gods." This is how to equip oneself to contend with death itself. The view may not be altogether Puritan but it is appealing--that the skills we develop here on earth as men help us to be happier and better men in heaven, and to give more pleasure even to God.

The view was not without its precedents. Plato believed that the lover of wisdom was the only one who would delight, or even could approach, the gods. But Milton's view bespeaks a contentment with the best possibilities that earth provides, if man makes use of them, which was not underscored in Plato's view. The idea in its non-Christian form was perhaps more evident in Roman thought. Cicero would have given much of the coloring to Milton's view in such a passage. In fact, Cicero's influence on the whole Prolusion was by no means slight.⁹

But the view had Christian antecedents as well. These were based on the belief that man, whether by a spiritual transformation or bodily resurrection, will be perfectly renewed in nature and see God "face to face." Augustine exemplifies the view in his City of God.

⁹ Numerous helpful comparisons of Cicero's thought to that of Milton are given in the Complete Prose, I:288. And a helpful understanding of Cicero's moral influence upon the tradition of Christian humanism is given by Bush, Renaissance, 57-63.

All the members and organs of the incorruptible body, which now we see to be suited to various necessary uses, shall contribute to the praises of God; for in that life necessity shall have no place, but full, certain, secure, everlasting felicity.... God himself, who is the author of virtue, shall there be its reward....when we are restored by Him, and perfected with greater grace, we shall have eternal leisure to see that He is God.... For even our good works, when they are understood to be rather His than ours, are imputed to us that we may enjoy this Sabbath rest. (Bk. 22. II:660-663)

The passage in its entirety conveys the sense of a transformed humanity. Felicity, seemliness, leisure, discoveries which shall enkindle praise of the great Artificer, beauty that appeals to reason, nothing unbecoming to spirit or body alike, an outgoing of affection, the gift of contentment to enjoy heaven's Sabbath rest--it was in such human terms that Augustine described the life to come. This was what Milton too believed man's life was tending toward and what he, more than Augustine, believed man's present life could begin to manifest. Augustine's description of "this Sabbath rest" accorded with Spenser's prayer to be granted "that Sabaoth's sight," when "all shall rest eternally" with God. Milton was suggesting in effect that when men employ their minds in the pursuit of Ars during the earthly leisure they are given, they prepare for and have a foretaste of that Sabbath rest.

Friendship is what Milton goes on to speak about:

*maxima pars civilis beatitudinis in humana
societate & contrahendis amicitiiis fere
constituta est....*

the greatest part of social happiness has usually been lodged in human fellowship and in the friendships contracted. (CE XII:262-263)

He admits that the learned are often awkward in society. But they, he says, know the meaning of true friendship and awaken it. His contrast between the activities of true friendship and false is interesting:

quid enim jucundius, quid cogitari potest
beatius illis doctorum & gravissimorum
hominum colloquiis, qualia sub illa platano
plurima saepe fertur habuisse divinus Plato,
digna certe quae totius confluentis generis humani
arrecto excipiantur silentio; at stolide
confabulari, alios aliis ad luxum & libidines
morem gerere ea demum ignorantiae est amicitia,
aut certe amicitiae ignorantia.

...for what can be imagined more delightful,
what more happy than those conferences of
learned and most eminent men, such as divine
Plato is said to have held very frequently
under that famous plane tree, which were
certainly worthy of being heard with attentive
silence by the whole of the confluent human race?
Whereas to babble with one another stupidly, to
gratify one another with splendor and licentiousness,
this is indeed the friendship of ignorance, or
really the ignorance of friendship.

(CE XII:262-265)

To be friends, in other words, is to have regard for that which distinguishes men from animals and share together what delights the mind. The fact that Plato is the one example given of what such friendship can be like suggests that Plato had much influence on Milton at this time.

At this point in the Prolusion Milton breaks out into praise of the riches and the power learning gives. He does so by describing them exuberantly. If his aim was to stir up excitement in his listeners, he certainly must have succeeded in doing so. It is well to keep in mind what he was trying to do. He was trying to show that the "noble and free pleasure of the mind" does bring "social happiness."

Quinetiam si haec civilis beatitudo in honesta liberaque oblectatione animi consistit, ea profecto doctrinae & arti reposita est voluptas, quae caeteras omnes facile superet; quid omnem coeli syderumque morem tenuisse?

Moreover, if this social happiness consists in the noble and free pleasure of the mind; if this delight, which easily excels all others, has been reserved for learning and knowledge; what does it avail to have comprehended every law of the heavens and of the stars?

(CE XII:264-265)

He was trying to stir up the conviction in his listeners that learning was the delight he said it was. Remember that he ends the long descriptive praise of learning by holding up to view the temporal benefits it brings.

Multarum Gentium oraculum esse, domum quasi templum habere, esse quos Reges & Respublicae ad se invitent, cujus visendi gratia finitimique exterique concurrant, quem alii vel semel vidisse quasi quoddam bene meritum gloriantur; haec studiorum praemia, hos fructus eruditio suis cultoribus in privata vita praestare, & potest, & saepe solet.

To be the oracle of many races; to have a house like a temple; to be those whom kings and states summon to themselves; to be one, for the sake of seeing whom, neighbors and strangers flock together; one whom, even to have seen once, some shall brag about as though it possessed some honorable merit. These rewards of study, these fruits, knowledge is able, and frequently is wont, to confer upon her devotees in private life.

(CE XII:266-269)

After he describes the wealth of learning glowingly, Milton gives his listeners a picture of the worldly renown this wealth may bring. -- Certainly the passage in its entirety is the consequence of an orator's skills, consciously employed to win his listeners' favorable acceptance of his argument. We must not, I think, be too ponderous in our as-

essment of such praise. This is not to say that Milton did not mean what he said, but only that he had his reasons for making the jewel of learning glitter at this point.

There is glitter to the passage of descriptive praise of learning:

omnes aeris motus & vicissitudines, sive
augusto fulminum sonitu, aut crinitis
ardoribus inertes animos perterrefaciat,
sive in nivem & grandinem obrigescat, sive
denique in pluvia & rore mollis & placidus
descendat; tum alternantes ventos perdidicisse,
omnesque halitus aut vapores quos terra aut
mare eructat; stirpium deinde vires occultas,
metallorumque caluisse, singulorum etiam
animantium naturam, & si fieri potest, sensus
intellexisse; hinc accuratissimam corporis
humani fabricam & medicinam; postremo divinam
animi vim & vigorem, & si qua de illis qui
Lares, & Genii, & Daemonia vocantur ad nos
pervenit cognitio? Infinita adhaec alia....

--all the motions and shiftings of the air,
whether it brings terror to sluggish minds
by the august sound of thunders or by fiery
locks, whether it becomes frozen in snow and
hail, whether finally it falls soft and gentle
in rain and dew; then to have learned perfectly
the changing winds, all the vapors and gases
which the earth and sea belch forth; next to
become versed in the secret powers of plants
and metals; also to have understood the nature
and, if possible, the feelings of each living
creature; thence the most exact structure and
surgery of the human body; and finally the
godlike power and force of mind; and whether any
knowledge comes to us about those beings which
are called Lares, Genii, and Demons? In addition
to these there are infinite others....

(CE XII:264-265)

It is a wealth which the listener is being presented with, a wealth that is given a special character. Tillyard points in the right direction when he says of it that "Milton goes back and recaptures the simple expansive faith in the joys

of knowledge, the insatiable appetite of the human mind, to be found in Marlowe and Sidney."¹⁰ Milton, like a poet, evokes a mood. The air may bring "terror" by the "august sound of thunders or by fiery locks," or may be "frozen" or fall "soft and gentle"; the earth "belches forth" vapors, plants and metals have "secret powers," the mind has "god-like power and force," and, finally, there may be knowledge to be had even of "Lares, Genii, and Demons." This is language and design of thought weighted to evoke a mood of awed attentiveness. It is, in short, a poet's kind of praise. And a poet thinks differently than a scientist. He does not want to perform surgery. He wants to heal by giving the mind a sense of the order and significance of the wealth within the world as it has been crested. He has a hunger, but not an "insatiable appetite"--from all the wealth that is at learning's command he wants to select "bonam partem," "a goodly part," and become sufficiently acquainted with that part to fill the mind with an encompassing sense of the meaning and direction of the world.

*Infinita adhaec alia, quorum bonam partem
didicisse licuerit, antequam ego cuncta
enumeraverim.*

In addition to these there are infinite others,
of which one might become acquainted with a
goodly part before I could enumerate all.

(CE XII:264-265)

It would be foolish to maintain that this is not an aspiration above the mark of innumerable individuals. Milton cer-

¹⁰

Correspondence, p. xxxvi.

tainly meant to limit the way of life he is proposing to men endowed with certain aptitudes. But it would be unfortunate to miss the main point that I believe he is trying to make--that one may gain from learning sufficient knowledge of sufficient subjects to come to have a certain mastery of life and even make a contribution that may prove worth while. As Milton suggests, "knowledge is able, and frequently is wont," to do just that.

It is not unjust to speak of hubris too--Milton does not lack for pride in the capacity of the human mind to know. But it would be a mistake to be so affected by the element of pride as to fail to see the splendor of the thought. However much Milton may have intended in his own mind to apply the thought of this Prolusion to his own life, it is not himself of whom he speaks here. He is setting forth a generous view of man. Above the hubris there stands out the verve.

hoc est, Auditores, omni aetati quasi
vividus interesse, & velut ipsius temporis
nasci contemporaneus; profecto cum nominis
nostri gloriae in futurum prospeximus, hoc erit
ab utero vitam retro extendere & porrigere,
& nolenti fato anteactam quandam immortalitatem
extorquere.

This means, my hearers, to reside in every age as if alive, to be born as though a contemporary of time itself. Surely, when we have peered into the future for the glory of our name, this will be to extend and stretch life backward from the womb and wrest away from fate a kind of immortality in time past. (CE XII:266-267)

It is a renascent spirit that Milton claims for man. In reading this it is impossible not to call the quality of renaissance to mind, for it is there. The entire passage is

alive with it.

The passage quoted above, in which Milton begins his description of the kinds of learning that should interest men, is really a reference to various sciences. Astronomy, the physical study of the sky and earth, anatomy, psychology, and possible knowledge of the unseen world are the subjects which he suggests that men should review. There is every likelihood that Milton was affected by the impetus that the works of Francis Bacon gave to a fresh interest in the natural world. The man who could write some of the passages in The New Atlantis was sure to interest the author of the Seventh Prolusion, especially since Bacon's work was first published in 1627 and would still have had the force of novelty.

"God bless thee, my son, I will give thee the greatest jewel I have; for I will impart unto thee, for the love of God and men, a relation of the true state of Solomon's House.

.....

"The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible."

(296-297)

The description of the center of scientific learning which Bacon goes on to give contains many parallels of detail with Milton's references to the sciences in the Prolusion. In spite of this, however, Milton's interest in natural science was not as thoroughgoing as Bacon's was. Milton was quite willing to let the mind sometimes "work upon itself," regardless of what Bacon, in The Advancement of Learning, might have

had to say. There are elements in Bacon's thought that must have caused Milton to draw back, as when Bacon wrote in the De Augmentis, "the philosophy we principally received from the Greeks must be acknowledged puerile, or rather talkative than generative--as being fruitful in controversies, but barren of effects."¹¹ It was precisely to the Greeks that, to all appearances, Milton actually turned.

From Bacon Milton may have received impetus, but it was from Plato that Milton received the pattern, and even the quality of his thoughts in this passage. Milton's source, however many subsequent sources may have entered in, was almost certainly the Timaeus. In order to show the evidence for this as briefly as possible, I will quote from Paul Shorey's resume in What Plato Said. Plato is presenting a theory of creation and its constituent parts which men can learn to know.

The world, then, is a likeness....
In order that the universe may represent the idea of living things of which it is a copy, it was made to contain the four types of living things, corresponding to the four elements....

First of these are the fixed stars and the divine heavenly bodies composed mostly of the element of fire....

The remainder of the Timaeus is... a rapid survey of what in modern parlance would be called physics, chemistry, meteorology, physiology, and medicine.... First come the "kinds" of matter, fire and air with their species flame, smoke, mist; the "kinds" of water, as, e.g., metals that

¹¹ Preface, p. 3 (Bohn ed.). Quoted by Willey, 32-33.

melt and flow and cool and in particular gold, adamant, bronze, and rust, hail, ice, and snow....

Then after the poetic episode of the postponed creation of the mortal soul, we pass to what may be called "physiology": the circulation of the blood, the localization of the three parts of the soul in the body and thereto of the liver, the spleen, the heart, the viscera, the bones, the flesh, the hair, the muscles, and the head, seat of the sovereign reason.

Plants, we are told, were created for the sake of man....The remaining topics are the nature and treatment of diseases, the four humors, some moral reflections on these themes, generation, metempsychosis, and reversed evolution....

But the true soul, Plato admonishes us, is no earthly plant rooted in appetite and ambition, but the reason, which God has given each of us as his attendant daemon or guardian angel, ...The mortal soul must of necessity think mortal thoughts. The soul that loves learning and wisdom should think thoughts immortal and divine and so, in the measure possible to man, become immortal itself. (333-344)

There is not only this striking similarity in the details of Milton's description with that of Plato. Shorey makes some observations concerning the intent which Plato had for all this learning and the tone in which he chose to present it which have great bearing on the intent and tone of Milton's thought in this passage of the Prolusion.

When men have passed out from the mythologic stage in which they ask not what is the cause of rain but "who rains," there remain for thinkers but two typical cosmogonies: (1) that which treats the universe as a vast machine sufficiently explained when we have ascertained the mechanical laws of its action; (2) that which looks upon the cosmos as a living organism guided or informed by a purpose that bears some intelligible relation to man's ideas of order, beauty, and right. (345)

Milton, too, did not choose to think of the universe as a vast machine. The very language of his passage in the Prolusion gives the sense of a living power in or behind created nature. Also when the passage is considered in the con-

text of the whole Prolusion, it would seem to me to be clear that in this passage too Milton is proposing learning as a means to help man find some order in relation to an ordering power of life.

Shorey further comments on the choice of words and style of thought which give Plato's description of the created world its special tone.

Moral and religious unction are secured by a conscious discrimination of synonyms, by a subtle use of the particles, by pregnant use and emphatic positions of qualifying adjectives and adverbs, and by a never failing Aeschylean grandeur of poetic diction. (349)

The similarity of this to Milton's choice of qualifying words to give poetic emphasis, his heightened intensity of thought beyond what any descriptive science would occasion, and his suggestion of a need for ordering and giving this knowledge the "godlike power and force of mind," should be evident. It is difficult not to conclude that Milton thought of such learning in the way that Shorey says that Plato wanted the learning presented in the Timmaeus to be thought of:

...the causal relations of things are revealed to us as the preconceived purposes of God contending with the limitations of necessity; anatomy is transfigured into a poetical making of man before the beginning of years, and pathology into an ethical lesson. (349)

12

The influence of Plato would seem to be considerable.

Irene Samuel once wrote that in Milton's early works

¹² The history of the reputation and influence of the Timmaeus is briefly traced by Lovejoy, note 31, p. 339.

"Plato had not yet begun to exercise a determinant influence upon him." (8) If she had had occasion to give the early works the careful attention she gave the later ones--which are the subject of her study--it does not seem likely that she would have held this view. Many of the careful and sound judgments which she makes concerning the relation of Milton's three major poems to Plato's works apply already to the Seventh Prolusion, especially those made in her chapter on "Knowledge." For example:

To be sure, men innumerable have found learning a delight, and if this were the whole or even a separable aspect of Milton's theory, we should hardly call it Platonic. But in Milton and Plato we find the same emphasis on the charm of study coupled with the same critical scrutiny of its use. Both insist on the constant devotion of subordinate learnings to a higher end,... The true knowledge satisfies reason, promotes virtue, and serves the common weal. (105)

Miss Samuel herself has pointed out what even in the Prolusion appears to me to be the chief distinction between Plato's more rigorously philosophical conception of the good life and Milton's own:

With Milton the highest good for man is a synthesis of elements even more diverse than entered into the concept of Plato, but again unified, as was Plato's by a single principle....He had only to cap the Platonic ideal in order to change the highest good from the philosophical life praised in the Dialogues to the 'more abundant' life of Christianity. (103)

While I think Milton already did more than "cap the Platonic ideal" it does seem to me precisely the 'more abundant' life of Christianity that controlled the thought of the Prolusion

and gives it a basic unity.

It may well be the multiplicity of elements in Milton's early works, especially in this Prolusion, which led Miss Samuel to misjudge the extent of Plato's influence upon Milton's early thought. For Plato is by no means the only influence at work upon Milton here. This is clear at once from the passages that continue the description of learning to be encompassed by the mind. In rapid order Milton alludes to or gives evidence of at least three influences.

*Sic tandem, Auditores, cum omnimoda semel
eruditio suos orbes confecerit, non contentus iste
spiritus tenebricoso hoc ergastulo eousque late
aget se, donec & ipsum mundum, & ultra longe
divina quadam magnitudine expatiata compleverit.
Tum demum plerique casus atque eventus rerum ita
subito emergent, ut ei, qui hanc arcem sapientiae
adeptus est, nihil pene incautum, nihil fortuitum
in vita possit accidere....*

So at length, my hearers, when once learning of all kinds shall have completed its cycles, that spirit of yours, not satisfied with this gloomy house of correction, will betake itself far and wide, until it shall have filled the world itself and far beyond with a certain divine extension of magnitude. Then at length many accidents and consequences of things will become clear so suddenly that nothing in life can happen quite unexpectedly, nothing by chance to one who has gained possession of this stronghold of wisdom.

(CE XII:264-267)

This is at least in part a Stoic view. The early Stoic view of the world is succinctly put by Fuller: "Salvation was reserved to the Stoic sage alone. The human race was almost entirely in a state of total depravity, utter folly, and complete unhappiness" (I:251). For the Roman Stoics like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius Stoicism had also brought the sense of gloom. Fuller says of Epictetus that "for him the

philosopher was primarily the healer of souls, whose message was more to the moral sense than to the intellect, and whose vocation was to arouse the conscience, to awaken a conviction of sin, to turn men from their wickedness and to point the way that led to happiness and peace" (I:268). Consequently, as Windelband points out, "the normal man, for this period, is not he who works and creates for the sake of great purposes, but he who knows how to free himself from the external world, and find his happiness in himself alone" (165). Also, to observe the inevitable course of things so that there could be no surprises left to trouble one was of the essence of the Stoic view.

And yet, for Milton, the view was just one influence. He could go right on to speak with glowing faith in man.

...videbitur sane is esse, cujus imperio &
dominationi astra obtemperant, terra & mare
obsecudent, venti tempestatesque morigerae sint;
cui denique ipsa Parens Natura in deditionem se
tradiderit, plane ac si quis Deus abdicato
mundi imperio, huic jus ejus, & leges,
administrationemque tanquam praefectori cuidam
commisisset.

He will seem to be one whose power and authority
the stars will obey, the land and the sea will
follow implicitly, the winds and the storms will
strive to please; one to whom Mother Nature
even will hand over herself in surrender, quite
as if some god, having abdicated power on earth,
had delegated to him his court, his laws, his
executive power, as though to some prefect.

(CE XII:266-267)

It is hard to find the "gloomy house of correction" here.

Milton presents, instead, the human lord of earth presented in Psalm 8.

Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works
of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet....(8:5-6)

This is, of course, just the first of many influences for
such a view.

But Milton's mind then races on another course.

Huc quanta accedit animi voluptas, per
omnes gentium historias & loca pervolare
Regnorum, Nationum, Urbium, Populorum
status mutationesque ad prudentiam, &
mores animadvertere....

How great a pleasure is added hereto by
flying through all the histories and
problems of the races, by directing the
attention, for the sake of practical judgment
and morals, to the conditions and vicissitudes
of kingdoms, nations, cities, peoples!
(CE XII:266-267)

Here, and in the succeeding section on the pleasures learn-
ing gives to men in public life, Milton's conception of the
study of history is in line with that of the great Greek and
Roman historians, not merely to describe but to select, and
that selection primarily "for the sake of practical judgment
and morals." His words suggest something of the spirit of
Plutarch's Lives, with which Milton may very well have been
imbued even as a child, through Sir Thomas North's popular
translation (and would certainly have come to read in the or-
iginal). Milton was not the only one for whom history had
come alive. It has been said of North's translation itself
that "North's version is great because the book he was trans-
lating was intensely alive for him.¹³

¹³ Lamson and Smith, *The Golden Hind* (1942), 615.

Milton shows his own knowledge and insight into at least the rudiments of ancient history in the arguments he sets forth for the place of learning in public life. He first admits that few learned men have been elevated to high public office. Instead, he says,

*Nimirum, illi apud se regno fruuntur,
omni terrarum ditione longe gloriosiori....*

Indisputably, these enjoy a kingdom in themselves far more glorious than all dominion over lands. (CE XII:268-269)

This often repeated point of view had been expressed by Milton in a letter to Thomas Young in 1628. In accepting an invitation to Young's country home, he says:

*...ubi tu in re modica regio sane animo
veluti Serranus aliquis aut Curius, in agello
tuo placide regnas, deque ipsis divitiis,
ambitione, pompa, luxuria, & quicquid vulgus
hominum miratur & stupet, quasi triumphum agis
fortunae contemptor.*

There, in a kingly spirit but with modest means, like some Regulus or Curius, you reign peacefully over your little estate, and, despising fortune, triumph over wealth, ambition, pomp, luxury, and all that common men admire and gape at. (CE XII:14. Tillyard, p. 9)

Only two men, he claims, have been both learned men and world rulers--Alexander the Great and Octavius Caesar, and he maintains that these are the best sort of men to trust the world's affairs to.--an opinion which it would be better to let historians debate.

However, he is conscious that even whole states have existed with scant learning in them. To this observation he has an answer though, and one which is not without validity. Such states, he says, have usually been provided with the

bases of civilization by some learned men,. He gives as an example the Roman acquisition of the Twelve Tables of the law. He gives short shrift to those states which appear to survive without learning.

parare vitae commoda, tueri parta, id
Naturae debemus, non Arti....

To provide the comforts of life, to guard
possessions--that we owe to Nature, not to Art.
(CE XII:270-271)

This is not so much argument as scorn. But he will return to the question of creaturely comforts again.

Finally, he says,

si antiquitatem repetamus, inueniemus non
institutas modo ab Arte, sed fundatas olim
fuisse respublicas.

But if we go back to antiquity, we shall
discover that the states were not only
regulated by, but oftentimes were established
on, knowledge.
(CE XII:270-271)

And with an amplification of this argument, Milton closes this important section of the Prolusion.

Cum repente Artes & Scientiae, agrestia
hominum pectora coelitus afflabant, &
imbutos notitia sui in una moenia pellexere.
...dein stabilitae legibus, post consiliis
munitae, poterunt iisdem etiam gubernatoribus
quam diutissime foelicissimeque consistere.

When suddenly the Arts and Sciences divinely
inspired the rude hearts of men and allured
within one wall those who were imbued with
knowledge of them....Afterward, protected by
counsellors, they were able to stand firmly a
very long time and very happily even under
the same rulers.
(CE XII:272-273)

The argument would not appear to be unreasonable. It is in line with the ordering and governing power of learning which, in different ways and with more feeling, he has suggested can

contribute to the soul's life and man's private life as well. Learning, by giving man the power to order and govern all aspects of his life, brings happiness.

The last main section of the Prolusion consists of refutations of charges made by Ignorance. There are three main charges which he permits Ignorance to advance: That life is short but art long, that the world is apt to end soon, therefore why bother to learn at all, and that ignorance itself gives greater blessedness. Milton's refutations of each of these charges provides considerable help in understanding his perspective in writing the Prolusion as a whole.

To the charge that life is short and art long, he gives the example of Galen as evidence that the reverse can be the truth, if we will remedy two defects in our studies.

*immo vero tollamus duo magna studiorum
nostrorum impedimenta, alterum artis male
traditae, alterum nostrae ignaviae, pace
Galenī, seu quis alius ille fuit; totum
contra erit, vita longa, ars brevis....*

By all means in truth let us remove the two great stumbling blocks to our studies;: the one of knowledge poorly taught, the other of our own slothfulness. With the permission of Galen, or whoever else it was, quite the contrary will it be: life will be long, art short.
(CE XII:272-273)

Now it begins to be quite evident that Milton has had in mind in this Prolusion a comprehending, not an exhaustively comprehensive view of learning when well taught.

But first he attacks man's proneness to be negligent.

*ab operariis & agricolis nocturna &
antelucana industria vinci nos patimur;*

illi in re sordida ad vilem victum magis
impigri sunt, quam nos in nobilissima ad
vitam beatam....

We permit ourselves to be outstripped by
laborers and farmers in nightly and early
morning toil. They are more unwearied in
humble matters for common nourishment, than
we in most noble matters for an abounding
life.
(CE XII:274-275)

The charge is one which, judging from the records of his early life, Milton had a right to make. It is also a charge which simple observation would suggest to be a most telling one. Somewhat less fairly, though not without its point, Milton goes on to suggest that the danger to health from late hours of study is little compared to the abuse men give their bodies through profligacy. He then underscores the need for purity. The way to subdue "primos ferocientis aetatis impetus," "the primary impulses of the ungovernable age" is by "ratione & pertinaci studiorum," "through reason and constant zeal in studies." The conception derives from Plato's myth of the soul, given in the Phaedrus, in which the noble horse, emotion allied with reason, is obedient to the charioteer, reason, while the ignoble horse, passions corresponding to sensation, does not want to obey. That "constant zeal in studies" could aid reason to govern the "primary impulses" had the weight of Milton's personal testimony to the pure delights with which he said, near the opening of the Prolusion, he had been favored. It is not unlikely that he spoke with some personal assurance when he said that, given the control of reason and genuine enthusiasm:

incredibile esse, Auditores, nobis post
annos aliquot respicientibus quantum spatium

confecisse, quam ingens aequor eruditionis
cursu placido navigasse videremur.

it would be incredible to us, my hearers,
on looking back after several years, how
great a distance has been traversed, what
a mighty sea of knowledge we shall seem to
have sailed over with a quiet passage.

(CE XII:274-276)

The passage has the power, not just of hubris, but of charm.

Milton then gives the reason why he can express himself with such quiet confidence and why it seems to me he could even permit himself the poetic exuberance of earlier passages.

Cui & hoc egregium afferet compendium, si
quis norit & artes utiles, & utilia in artibus recte
seligere.

To this also a distinct gain would be added:
if one could both know the useful arts and
could properly choose the useful in the arts.

Select the right studies and then select what is most useful in each of them. Nothing could be plainer or more reasonable than this. It is the key to Milton's thoughts on education. To read those passages where he is caught up by his enthusiasm and not to see that, by the very poetic shape he gives his language, this principle of selectivity underlies them is to misread them all. He was daring and challenging but not insensitive. Later he was to place in the commonplace book, under the heading "De Liberis Educandis," "The Education of Children," the following note:

natura cujusque imprimis inspicenda nec
torquenda aliorum deum enim non omnes ad
singula destinat, sed ad suum quemque opus
proprium unde Dantes e se 'l mondo la
giu ponesse mente al fondamento che natura pone &c.
vide Paradiso cant: 8.

The nature of each one should be most carefully examined and not forced into a different mould; for God does not destine all men for one thing, but for work that is appropriate to each. Thus Dante, "if the world below paid heed to the foundation laid by nature." (CE XVIII:153-154)

Milton then proceeds to rail against the abuses which he says the followers of learning have had to endure. Grammarians and rhetoricians have dealt with "nugae aspernabiles," "despicable trifles." Logic should be queen of the arts, "at heu quanta est in ratione insania!", "but alas, how great is the folly of the rational faculty!" Metaphysics is "non artem inquam plerumque, sed infames scopulos," "not knowledge for the most part but infamous rocks." Law is "methodus obscurat," "a confused system." And, what I suppose some readers will take to be the most outrageous fault, "quod pejus est, sermo nescio quis, Americanus credo," "what is worse, our speech is, I know not what, American, I suppose." (CE XII: 276-277). It is, however, only the legal language of England that he abuses so.

So far in this passage Milton has been striving to crush what he considers errors in the teaching of the arts, not by arguments, but by language weighted to tell how outlandish all these errors are. At this point he is attempting to win his argument by force. He then shifts from negative overstatement to positive overstatement in order to thrust in upon his listeners the supreme advantages that true learning gives.

Quapropter, Auditores, si nullum a pueritia
diem sine praeceptis & diligenti studio vacuum
ire sinamus, si in arte, aliena supervacanea otiosa

sapienter omittamus, certe intra aetatem
 Alexandri magni majus quiddam & gloriosius illo
 terrarum orbe subegerimus: tantumque aberit quo
 minus brevitatem vitae, aut artis taedium
 incusemus, ut flere & lachrymari promptius nobis
 futurum credam, ut illi olim, non plures superesse
 mundos de quibus triumphemus.

Accordingly, my hearers, if from childhood we
 permit no day to pass by without lessons and
 diligent study; if from knowledge we wisely
 omit the foreign, the superfluous, the useless;
 certainly within the age of Alexander the Great
 we shall have subdued something greater and more
 glorious than his circle of the earth; and we
 shall be so far from finding fault with the
 brevity of life or the irksomeness of knowledge
 that I believe we shall be more ready to weep
 and shed tears, as did that famous one long ago,
 because no more worlds are left over which we
 may triumph. (CE XII:278-279)

Again, I believe he used the force which such extravagance
 would have in order to win his audience. For there is some-
 thing good-natured in endowing his listeners with such abil-
 ities. At any rate, I am sure he intended the passage to
 have a calculated capacity to delight and stun.

Milton then allows ignorance to make its second argu-
 ment. The world is coming to an end, and there will be no
 men left to extol us with their praise. Again, he begins
 with language that is extravagant.

Expirat Ignorantia, jam ultimos videte
 conatus & morientem luctam....

Ignorance breathes its last! Now behold the
 final struggles and the dying effort!
 (CE XII:278-279)

It is interesting to note that in describing the possi-
 bility of the world's end, Milton speaks of a speedy destruc-
 tion by fire, as he did in Natura Non Pati Senium. But the

stress is placed by Ignorance upon the likelihood of being cheated out of earthly glory.

Mortales praecipue gloria tangi, antiquos
illos illustres longa annorum series atque
decursus cum celebrarit, nos properante
rerum omnium occasu premi, si quid praedicandum
aeterna laude reliquerimus, nostrum nomen in
angusto versari, cujus ad memoriam vix ulla
posteritas succedet, frustra jam tot Libros
& praeclara ingenii monumenta edi quae
vicinus mundi rogos cremarit.

We living mortals particularly are to be cheated out of glory, while a long chain and descent of years has made famous those illustrious ancients; we, in the decadent old age of the world, we, by the speedy destruction of all things, are to be overwhelmed, if we shall have left behind anything to be extolled with everlasting praise; our name is to abide but a short time, for hardly may any posterity succeed to its memory; vain is it now to produce so many books and eminent monuments of ability, which the approaching funeral pyre of the world will consume. (CE XII:278-279)

The significance of the passage derives from the completeness with which he sets forth the view. His thoroughness in treating it suggests that he has given it serious thought. This will have to have some bearing on the discussion of Lycidas as a poem that expresses a possible sense of personal crisis in Milton's outlook on his own career. The stress placed upon this passage in the present work suggests that Milton has shaped his thoughts on the happiness which learning gives with Christian conceptions of the world and human life in mind. For he accepts this possibility that the world may end: "non inficior illud esse posse verisimile," "I do not deny that this can very likely take place." But in answer to this possibility he is ready to make a reply, one

that Lycidas was to reaffirm: "at vero non morari gloriam cum bene feceris, id supra omnem gloriam est," "but, in truth, not to value fame when you have done well, that is beyond all glory." The line is one that lingers in the memory. It is an ennobling Christian conception of how man should work. He goes on to amplify the view:

Quam nihil beavit istos inanis hominum sermo
cujus ad absentes & mortuos nulla voluptas,
nullus sensus pervenire potuit? nos sempiternum
aevum expectemus quod nostrorum in terris
saltem benefactorum memoriam nunquam delebit;
in quo, si quid hic pulchre meruimus, praesentes
ipsi audiemus, in quo qui prius in hac vita
continentissime acta omne tempus bonis artibus
dederint, iisque homines adjuverint, eos
singulari & summa supra omnes scientia auctos
esse futuros multi graviter philosophati sunt.

How little has the idle discourse of men enriched the departed and the dead, discourse of which no delight, no emotion could reach them? May we hope for an eternal life, which will never wipe out the memory at least of our good deeds on earth: in which, if we have nobly deserved anything here, we ourselves, being present, shall hear it; in which many have seriously reasoned that those would be exalted above all by a unique and supreme knowledge, who, first in this life, spent most temperately, have given all their time to good employments, and by them have aided mankind. (CE XII:278-281)

This is a very carefully presented view. One does not work here on earth just to become famous, he says. It is eternal life that gives significance to our lives here. In other words, as in the sonnet, How Soon Hath Time, Milton is suggesting that God watches what men do on earth and that this must be the controlling thought behind what they choose to do. According to many, he says, to do well here will qualify a person to receive "singulari & summa...scientia,"

"unique and supreme knowledge" in the life to come. But the suggestion of earthly "contemplatio" as the proper preparation for this heavenly "scientia" is not now the controlling thought--as I have tried to indicate that it is not in and of itself the controlling thought in the first main section of the Prolusion. Those who would receive such a heavenly blessing, he says, are those who have devoted "omne tempus," "all their time" to "bonus artibus," "good skills" by which "homines adjuverint," "they have assisted mankind."

Milton is expressing a central Christian conviction. It derives from such New Testament passages as Matthew 6:1, in which Jesus tells his listeners to give attention to what God thinks of them, not men; otherwise, "you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." Milton's view was also influenced by the vision of the Son of man sitting in judgment upon the nations, as given in Matthew 25:31 ff., following the parable of the talents. It was given a decisive form by Paul in Romans:

For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-going seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.... There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil,...but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good.... (2:6-8)

The development of the doctrine was of major consequence in Christianity. There was always some form of belief that Christ made it possible for men to accomplish good. The theories of how he did this were numerous, ranging from those that attributed this power to the divine Logos to those who

made either the incarnation or atonement or both decisive. The emphasis in early Christian thought was upon the moral demands that God made on men. McGiffert goes so far as to say:

The notion that in Christianity there is free and full and repeated forgiveness was not the notion of these early Christians. They were true to Christ and Paul in emphasizing righteousness rather than forgiveness. And like them they were interested in moral reformation rather than in the assurance of pardon for those who sinned. Moral rigor, not leniency, was the dominant note in this period. (History, I:83)

Although in the judgment of many such statements as applied to Christ and Paul would have to be strongly qualified, it appears that the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists such as Justin Martyr strongly influenced Christianity with such a view. According to Justin, men have the power to do right once God gives them light. And he does give this light, since the divine Logos gives men the power of reason; therefore he demands virtue and rewards it and punishes evil-doing. ¹⁴

There were, however, happier forms which such views could take. Augustine, who could of course write sternly of the demands God makes on men, reveals in some parts of The City of God the splendid temperateness with which he was capable of viewing the life of man in relation to the life to come with God. Book Nineteen of The City of God is of major importance in understanding the orientation of Milton's mind when he came to view such subjects as this one of happiness.

¹⁴ See Kelly, 96-97.

Not only does it provide numerous parallels to Milton's thought, as expressed in this Prolusion and elsewhere, but the temper of Augustine's thinking at this point in his great work bears a resemblance to what much of Milton's work suggests was his way of seeing and assessing life also. The immediate parallel from Augustine's work with Milton's passage in the Prolusion is the following:

God, then, the most wise Creator and most just Ordainer of all natures, who placed the human race upon earth as its greatest ornament, imparted to men some good things adapted to this life, to wit, temporal peace, such as we can enjoy in this life from health and safety and human fellowship, and all things needful for the preservation and recovery of this peace....and all under this most equitable condition, that every man who made a good use of these advantages suited to the peace of this mortal condition, should receive ampler and better blessings, namely, the peace of immortality, accompanied by glory and honor in an endless life made fit for the enjoyment of God and of one another in God.... (XIX, 13. Vol.II:489)

Because the Reformed tradition had become so important even in Anglicanism, and because Milton can be supposed to have been affected by such thought, it will be helpful to give some brief quotations from Calvin's Institutes which show the similarities and differences of the Protestant and Catholic view of good works on earth and heavenly rewards. Sometimes I leave out Calvin's qualifying statements, both for brevity and emphasis. But it can be assumed that he always qualifies the significance of man's works by their dependence upon Christ's work.

We may be certain, therefore, that the commencement of our salvation is, as it were, a resurrection from death to life; because, when "on the behalf of Christ it is given to us to believe on him," we then begin to experience a transition from death to life. (III, 14, par. 6. Vol.II:9)

Although it is only in the background of Milton's thinking in the Prolusion, I believe this is a Protestant conviction which Milton strongly held, as the Nativity Ode and Sonnet 7 and the "Letter to a Friend" all indicate. Calvin says that:

concerning the beginning of justification, there is no dispute between us and the sounder schoolmen, but we all agree, that a sinner being freely delivered from condemnation obtains righteousness, and that by the remission of his sins; only they, under the term justification, comprehend that renovation in which we are renewed by the Spirit of God to an obedience to the law, and so they describe the righteousness of a regenerate man as consisting in this--that a man, after having been once reconciled to God through faith in Christ, is accounted righteous with God on account of his good works, the merit of which is the cause of his acceptance. But the Lord, on the contrary, declares, "that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness, "not during the time while he yet remained a worshipper of idols, but after he had been eminent during many years for the sanctity of his life.

(III, 14, par.11. Vol. II:13-14)

Calvin, however, would not have men disdain the significance of their good character and works.

The saints often confirm and console themselves with the remembrance of their own innocence and integrity, and sometimes even refrain not from proclaiming it.

No obstacle arises from these things to prevent good works being considered by the Lord as inferior causes. But how does this happen? Because those whom his mercy has destined to the inheritance of eternal life, he, in his ordinary dispensations, introduces to the possession of it by good works.

(III,14,par. 18 & 21. Vol.II:20 & 23)

At the close of the next chapter, Calvin then believes he is able to explain how men are judged of God by their fruits.

We do not justify men by works before God;
but we say, that all who are of God are
regenerated and made new creatures, that
they may depart from the kingdom of sin into
the kingdom of righteousness; and that by this
testimony they ascertain their vocation, and,
like trees, are judged by their fruits.

(III,15,par.8. VolIII:34)

Finally, Calvin is able to make that point which would permit the Protestant Milton to relate the works of man on earth to his rewards in heaven.

I grant, therefore, that the works of
believers are rewarded by those things
which the Lord has promised in his law to
the followers of righteousness and holiness;
but in this retribution it is always necessary
to consider the cause, which conciliates such
favour to those works. (III,17,par.3. Vol II:44)

The permit is here issued to Protestants of the Reformed tradition, but a reading of Book III of Calvin's work makes it readily apparent that Milton's inspiration came not simply from such a source but from one side of Augustine or those who were themselves strongly influenced by this side
15
of Augustine's thought.

Milton ends this passage in the Prolusion on a note that is considerably more restrained. He now admits that the sciences may sometimes be uncertain and involved; but the greatest difficulties "non tam scientiae, quam homini attribuenda sunt," "ought to be attributed not so much to science as to man." It is man's faults, he says,

quod & illud nescire Socraticum & timidam
Scepticorum haesitationem aut refellit, aut
consolatur, aut compensat.

¹⁵Cf. Mackinnon, Calvin, 231-236.

which either disproves or mitigates or counter-balances both that Socratic ignorance and the cautious uncertainty of the Sceptics. (CE XII:280-281)

It is not without reason that he descends from altogether outright disproving to the possibility of only mitigating or counterbalancing the effects of ignorance. For he is now to speak of "Ignorantiae beatitudo," "the blessedness of Ignorance," in a most significant way.

Jam vero tandem aliquando quaenam Ignorantiae beatitudo? sua sibi habere, a nemine laedi, omni cura & molestia supersedere, vitam secure & quiete, quoad potest, traducere; verum haec ferae aut volucris cujuspiam vita est quae in altis & penitissimis sylvis in tuto nidulum coelo quamproximum habet, pullos educit, sine aucupii metu in pastum volat, diluculo, vesperique suaves modulos emodulatur. Quid ad haec desideratur aethereus ille animi vigor? Exuat ergo hominem, dabitur sane Circaeum poculum, ad bestias prona emigret....

Now in faith what truly is the blessedness of Ignorance? To possess its own for itself, to be defamed by nobody, to avoid every care and trouble, to spend life as easily and calmly as possible. But this is the life of a beast or of some bird which has its nest for safety as close to the sky as possible, on the heights or in the deepest forests, which trains its young, which flies to the feeding ground without fear of the fowler, which at dawn and at evening sings sweet strains. What does that ethereal vigor of the soul long for beyond these? Well, let it lay aside the human; let it be given the Circean cup; stooping let it migrate to the beasts. (CE XII:280-281)

Even the attentive reader has to stop and remind himself at the beginning of this passage that he is being given an argument to be attacked and not the preface to a modern manual on the goals of life. Milton here again reveals his ability to penetrate into an opposing view with real fair-mindedness.

And, in fact, the passage can hardly fail to have a universal appeal. Who has not sometimes thought he wanted just such things as these? To live for oneself; to avoid making enemies; to avoid responsibility and anything troublesome; to live at ease and let the world go by before the time that Homer wrote of Circe this way of life must have attracted men.

Milton is presenting the Epicurean man as the highest form that Ignorance can give to happiness. It is a view that through the centuries appears to have lost none of its attractive power. To go no further than Fuller we can see what Epicurus' "ataraxia" or "peace of mind" was like.

To pleasure thus defined as absence of desire, of physical discomfort, and of mental disturbance, Epicurus gives the name of ataraxia.... All men can be happy, almost without effort, if only they will. For all men can cultivate the amenities of life, and to a large extent can avoid its disagreeable aspects.... The wise man...will prefer to live in quiet retirement, avoiding the burdens of the citizen, and taking no part in the affairs of state.
(I:239-240)

The contrast of this part of the Prolusion with the opening section is an interesting one. For Milton it is all right to make use of the seclusion which the fields and woodlands of nature provide; but to go through life at best like a bird, doing nothing but singing "sweet strains" is no true happiness. And it is at this point that he brings the facts of life to bear upon his conception of happiness. If one is not going to live a life of ease, ars, after all, involves a life of strenuousness. That is why he had to prepare for this

passage by suggesting the possibility that learning can only mitigate or counter-balance the effects of ignorance; because he has to prepare his listeners to accept his open admission that in reality the way to find true happiness requires that man put to work the powers he has been given. Milton must become forthrightly realistic in the end. He makes it very evident now that the life devoted to the kind of learning that he has in view is not of a monastic kind. It is the kind of learning that equips a person to meet and master and engage in life. It is not philosophia if by that one means a study which looks to contemplatio as its goal. It is the kind of learning that looks to some form of practice or action as its goal instead. To be precise, it is an English and, some like to say, right-minded view of learning that he has in mind. It is the view of classical Christian humanism tempered by the English mind. Already Milton stands near the height of that tradition which England has contributed to the world--the tradition of those who seek to see life whole in order to make an art of it and establish in this world some measure of the meaning and character of a life they look to come. It would be a pity to turn one's back on such an inheritance.

Who is it that had shaped the character of Milton's thinking up to this time? Not those old schoolmen whose works he sometimes read, but the schoolmen of his own academies. Not even those ancient authors first of all but the artists, the writers actually, of his own British Isles. I am

speaking now of first influences, the kind a boy feels first and that live with him when he becomes a man. It was his own first origins in England that led him to the place at which he had arrived in this Prolusion. These are the origins which it would be hard to assess in words, for they were not the kind of origins that drew attention to themselves. They were the kind that led a man to range out into his world, and "live as if alive in every time." Linacre, Grocyn, Colet, Lily, Elyot, Cheke and Ascham and their colleagues stood behind the masters of Milton's schools, as Chaucer, Wyatt, Lyly, Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, Chapman, North and Shakespeare were the kind who first gave fire to young English minds. I do not mean that they were models by Milton's day but modelers. They were the ones who gave a living inheritance by which men of a new day would be able to give a color and texture to learning, art and life which they could call their own. They gave more than that: they gave the particular opening back into time. They gave the character to the way that men like Milton would look "back through history up the stream of time." They gave men the drive to let their minds range far beyond their shores and the desire to give an order to the worlds they saw, to put the past to work in the present tense of time.

Lewis emphasizes the flowering and the lasting force of the movement that took place in England in the sixteenth century, though he is less generous toward its antecedents. He restricts the "golden" period to "the last quarter of the century," and says of it that "the unpredictable happens." It

is hard to understand how he can read Skelton and Wyatt and
 15
 say that, but certainly the display he sees is there:

Fantasy, conceit, paradox, colour, incantation
 return. Youth returns.... Sidney, Spenser,
 Shakespeare, Hooker--even, in a way, Lyly--dis-
 play what is almost a new culture: that culture
 which was to last through most of the seven-
 teenth century and to enrich the very meanings
 of the words England and Aristocracy. (1)

It seems to me that Lewis' restricted definition of hu-
 manism as "the critical principles and critical outlook" of
 those "who taught, or learned, or at least strongly favoured,
 Greek and the new kind of Latin" results in a partial and
 inadequate discussion of the humanists' significance. On the
 basis of their initiation of "that temper and those critical
 principles which have since come to be called 'classicism';
 "he says that humanism "would have prevented if it could" the
 literature that actually did occur. (19) But this judgment,
 like his definition of humanism itself, leaves out their
 broader contribution to the thought of their times and that
 which succeeded it. Many of Lewis' strictures on their
 thought must be correct, but I fail to see how he can justly
 say that their attack upon the schoolmen was "not a war be-
 tween ideas" but "a war against ideas." It is certainly true
 that in attacking the excesses of scholastic thought they had
 their share of excesses too, just as Anglicans and Puritans
 were to have nearly a century later. Humanism "beat back
 metaphysics" not only in the interests of eloquence but be-
 cause the humanists were among those who were influenced by a

¹⁵ See, e.g., Tillyard, Renaissance, ch. 2. But read the
 poems.

different and ethical view, one that depended upon ideas too. In his contrast of humanism with scholastic thought, Lewis does not discuss their interest in ethics or the influence of Plato or Cicero upon their thoughts, apparently because he implies that it did not take any recognizable form.¹⁶

And yet, after all his criticisms, Lewis recognizes what seems to me the vital point--that the English students themselves (and I suppose this included poets too) took something from the books they read besides a love of rhetoric. Although he nowhere quite admits this, he recognizes it, so that his picture of future poets "growing up from boyhood" in and out of school is quite just.

This concrete knowledge, mixed with their law, rhetoric, theology, and mythology, bred an outlook very different from our own. High abstractions and rarified artifices jostled the earthiest particulars. ... They talked more readily than we about large universals such as death, change, fortune, friendship, or salvation; but also about pigs, loaves, boots, and boats. The mind darted more easily to and fro between that mental heaven and earth.... Much of their literary strength (when at the end of the century they became strong) is bound up with this. They talk something like angels and something like sailors and stable-boys; never like civil servants or writers of leading articles. (62)

¹⁶ See, e.g., p. 52. Lewis appears to agree with Gilson as to the "sterility" of Roman thought (Gilson, 540-542). Still, the avowed impact of Cicero's thought on various Christian thinkers remains a fact, as does the transmission of Greek thought by Latin writers, however imperfectly. See especially Shorey, Platonism, 67. Shorey also says that the references to Plato that he has found in the English humanists "would swamp this chapter" (177).

As for the training in the schools in Milton's day, D. L. Clark in his judicious study of St. Paul's shows the strength that would appear to have outstripped the defects in the kind of early education Milton had. Colet long before had set the goal for St. Paul's scholars: "instruct the chyldren in greke and Redyng laten in Redyng unto them suyche auctours that hathe with wisdome joyned the pure chaste eloquence."¹⁷ Clark's description of the five parts of rhetoric shows that they would present a challenge to an alert young mind. He also shows how closely related to rhetoric the art of logic was, and the significance of both of these to Milton (Ch. I). His description of the basic curriculum and his conclusions regarding the effects of such studies upon Milton appear to me to apply even though Fletcher thinks it likely that "Milton attended only the upper Forms (I:162)--especially when we remember the impression that his earlier tutor, Thomas Young, had made on him. Clark presents much evidence for his conclusion that:

Milton's teachers, and hence Milton himself when he became a man, did not suffer from divided aims and morbid doubts about the purpose of education, however much they might differ about the best means of attaining their aims. Everyone knew that good morals were the morals taught by the Bible and by the noble pagans of Greece and Rome. Everyone knew that good literature was contained in the accepted canon of Greek and Latin classics as summed up by Quintilian. Everyone knew that man is born into the world with the taint of original sin.... The teacher must work against the sinful and depraved nature of the boys if he is to succeed in bringing them up to good

¹⁷From Colet's Statutes, as quoted in Clark, 101.

literature. (55)

For Milton anyway, there is ample reason to conclude with Clark that "this humanistic education which he received at St. Paul's School had a profound influence on the mature Milton and contributed to making him what he became" (4).

Luther and especially Calvin and the thinkers of the reformed tradition were present to the minds of Englishmen. But they were present in a different way because of the schoolmasters and authors who had marked the English mind so vividly. There were a multitude of other influences, of course, but these, along with the peculiar origins of the Church of England, are the ones that most stand out. It is hard to know whether Hooker himself was more of a manifestation of what had been taking place in English minds or an influence over them. Probably few men in Milton's time could read Hooker's Laws without the spirit of their thinking being either confirmed or at least partly changed. All these influences combined to give a 'catholic' temper to the minds of those in Milton's England who were fortunate enough to move in the mainstream of their inheritance. And Milton was one of those who did move there. It is not enough to say that he had an eclectic type of mind. He had a mind trained by tradition as well as an innate capacity to draw together a multitude of influences into a living form--the form his own mind gave them but with a texture that was tapestried from English goods.

Puritan was part of England too. It is possible, how-

ever, that the ethic of the Christian humanists, coming from men like Erasmus and Thomas More, was as much an origin of what came to be called "Puritanism" in England as Protestantism was. The spirit of Tyndale, and of Wycliff himself, "the morning star of the Reformation," would have inspired England toward Puritan ways, just as they affected the very language of the English Bibles that men read.¹⁸ In fact, to make an English Bible was in essence a Puritan act. Milton¹⁹ was a Puritan in its wider sense--he wanted religion and learning to bear upon a person's way of life, and it was that end which affected the way he thought men ought to learn. He was a Protestant, but not one who would ever be content with just Geneva's keys. England had already bestowed on him more keys than that.

Perhaps the greatest key was just that ardor to want to make life in some way truer than it was the day before. That, he saw and said, gives inward happiness--but not without some agony. For no one lives who has not wanted to possess, and somewhere there must be some struggle if that desire is to be disavowed. And no one can find pleasure in the possibility that his course of life will cause him to be defamed, and yet, already Milton saw the inevitable if the strength of one's

¹⁸ Tyndale, of course, was the dominant influence. But see Hurst, 262. Knappen, 8-9, discusses the significance of Wyclif for Protestantism. Smithen also refers to the effect of Wyclif in his introduction and conclusion.

¹⁹ Haller has pointed out that Milton was never comfortable for too long a time with the Puritan 'establishment'

convictions is as strong as the opposing tide. His early disaffection with his fellow students over the issue of scholastic studies would have been enough to enable him to see how such a chain stretched out, given the imagination with which he was endowed. He understood that cares and troubles would come from wanting to right some wrong when one chooses to follow to its practical end the kind of learning which he still said would lead to happiness. Ease and calm, he said, do not add up to happiness. Not if learning was designed to contribute to life some measure of what men still called true. And for Milton learning could not be a by-way, it had to relate men to life's end.

Here in the last main section of his last Prolusion he was back into the spirit with which the Fifth Prolusion closed, but more richly and with more control. Truth must win a triumph over error, deceit must be defeated in the Circean stronghold of creaturely comfortableness if men are ever to discover happiness. "Quid ad haec desiderature aethereus ille animi vigor?" "What does that ethereal vigor of the soul long for beyond these?" Men must stretch the muscles of their minds to reach the answer Milton believed a human life can find. If not, what?

Ad bestias vero? at illae tam turpem
hospitem excipere nolunt, si quidem illae
sive inferioris cujusdam rationis participes,
quod plurimi disputarunt, sive pollenti quodam
instinctu sagaces, aut artes, aut artium simile
quoddam apud se exercent.

To the beasts, in truth? But they do not wish
to receive such a vile guest, since they are

either partakers of some low form of reasoning, as many argue, or they are wise with a certain powerful instinct; they employ among themselves either the arts or something like the arts.
(CE XII:208-283)

Even the animals and birds have more art than Ignorance.

Sapiunt altius bestiae, quam ut suo coetu & consortio ignorantiam dignentur; inferius detrudunt. Quid ergo? ad truncos & saxa.... an & haec aspernantur a se Ignorantiam?

The beasts possess deeper wisdom than to deem Ignorance fit for their gatherings and associations; lower do they drive it. What next? As to trees and rocks?....Do not even these also drive Ignorance away from themselves?
(CE XII:282-285)

There is an art, an order, inherent in all that is, but none in Ignorance. For Ignorance is worse than nothing at all.

Num igitur infra omne Brutorum genus, infra Stipites & Saxa, infra omnem Naturae ordinem licebit in illo Epicureorum non-esse requiescere? Ne id quidem: quandoquidem necesse est, quod pejus, quod vilius, quod magis miserum, quod infimum est, esse Ignorantiam?

Will it then be permitted to find repose in that Not-Being of the Epicureans, below every kind of brute, below the trees and rocks, below every rank of Nature? Not even that, since it is necessary that what is more evil, what is more base, what is more wretched, what is lowest, be Ignorance.
(CE XII:282-285)

This is satire presented with extraordinary skill. The language Milton uses as he descends in search of Ignorance not only has the quality of raciness, but it carries with it the pungent smell of truth.

The closing peroratio is also done with excellent style. It has a mock-heroic quality with the bite of seriousness.

Ad vos venio, Auditores intelligentissimi, nam & ipse si nihil dixissem, vos mihi tot non

tam Argumenta, quam tela video, quae ego in Ignorantiam usque ad perniciem contorquebo. Ego jam Classicum cecini, vos ruite in praelium; summovete a vobis hostem hanc, prohibete vestris porticibus & ambulacris; hanc si aliquid esse patiamini, vos ipsi illud eritis, quod nostis omnium esse miserimum. Vestra itaque haec omnium causa est.

I come to you, my most intelligent auditors; for, even though I myself said nothing, I perceive that for me you are not so many arguments as weapons, which I will turn against Ignorance, even to its destruction. I have now sounded the trumpet; do you rush into battle; drive away this enemy from you; ward it off from your porticoes and walks. If you should permit it to become something, you yourselves will become that which you know is the most wretched of all. Yours therefore is this cause of all. (CE XII:284-285)

Act or become the opposite of happy--ignorant.

There is no glorification of the joys of contemplation here.

There is no mention even of "beatitudo." "Tela...in Ignorantiam usque ad perniciem," "weapons, against ignorance, even to its destruction"--his listeners are the means by which Ignorance will be destroyed. Again, the challenge implies a generous estimate of the abilities with which such men have been endowed. And what they do, he says, they do for all. He closes on a quiet but compelling note of seriousness.

Quare si ego jam multo fortasse prolixior fuerim, quam pro consuetudine hujus loci liceret, praeterquam quod ipsa rei dignitas hos postulabat, dabitur & vos mihi veniam, opinor, Iudices, quandoquidem, tanto magis intelligitis vos quo sim animo, quam vestri studiosus, quos Labores, quas Vigilias vestra causa non recusarim. Dixi.

Wherefore, if I have perchance been much more wordy than is permitted by the custom of this exercise, beyond that which the very dignity of the subject

demanded, even you, my judges, will grant to me forbearance, I think, since you understand so much the better my opinion of you, how zealous I am for you, what labors, what vigils I have not refused in your behalf. I have spoken.
(CE XII:284-285)

By such a passage he must have made his listeners feel they counted too.

The work is, of its kind, a major accomplishment. There is art here of an order that can amaze, delight and thrill. And there is thought which conveys the power that learning can bestow on life--not just the power to dominate or possess but the power to order and by ordering fulfill some end.

CHAPTER SIX

A WAY OF LIFE: SONNET 7 AND A "LETTER TO A FRIEND"

With the delivery of the Seventh Prolusion, Milton's academic life at Cambridge was near an end. He had almost certainly resolved by now upon the next period of his future plans. The sonnet, "How soon hath Time," and the "Letter to a Friend" express the settled dedication which he reached. They show the intensity and direction that Milton's dedication came to have. Although he says in the letter that the sonnet had been written earlier, they were written within a few months of one another and both apparently after Milton went to Horton.¹ Milton includes the sonnet in the letter, and there is something to be gained by considering them together.

The letter is a most important one. Milton shows the importance he attached to it by having carefully penned two drafts, the second of which will be referred to here (CE XII:322-325). Tillyard remarks on the importance of the letter, in which, he says, "for the first time Milton states the very essence of his personal creed...namely his

¹Parker dates the sonnet in December, 1632, not 1631 as had been supposed. Parker's date appears correct, as Woodhouse agrees. The "Letter" would then belong to the early months of 1633. But there is no unanimity in the acceptance of these dates. For a discussion of dates assigned to the sonnet see LR I:259 & V:378-379; for the "Letter," see LR I:264-265 & V:379.

belief in the virtue of high action."² There is, of course, more to the letter than that. Primarily it reveals how carefully Milton made his act of dedication and, along with the sonnet, what the nature of that dedication was like.³

Milton was writing to a friend with whom he had spoken the previous day, probably an older person and certainly someone with a seriously Christian view of life. Milton's playful supposition at the close of the letter that he might "spoyle all the patience of a parish" suggests that he may have been urged to consider again the ministry as a career. The issue with which Milton is confronted is stated right away: should he act or should he contemplate? The answer is made to depend on what he believes that Christ commands for him. He compares his life to the "howres of the night...(for so I call my life as yet obscure, & unserviceable to mankind)...." He admits the fairness of his friend's admonishment "that the day with me is at hand wherein Christ commands all to labour while there is light." It is always right, he says, to desire "that god should be honoured in

² Milton, 57.

³ Hanford noted the obvious importance of the letter and the poem, though I think he overdramatized the element of conflict in the decision Milton made ("Youth", 128). Woodhouse wrote that sonnet 7 is "the record of an experience just as definite and far more decisive than that of the Nativity Ode and Elegy 6" ("Notes", 67). Further in the same article he said that "the mark of a genuine religious experience is its power to change one's view of things, and of the relation of the self thereto," and concluded that the sonnet had such marks (97). I do not think that the poem and letter mark a change. Instead, they confirm and clarify an attitude already held (this is a religious experience too). But Woodhouse had already made the vital point when he recognized the Nativity Ode and Sonnet 7 both as expressions of an experience of gradual regeneration, "the maturing of the seeds sown by a Christian education" (73).

every one...."

But Milton is prepared with a reply to his friend's admonishment. It is a carefully considered one, based on his conscience and his trust in God--"according to the praecept of my conscience, which I firmly trust is not without god." He has made a firm decision, not one for which he feels he must apologize but one on which he is ready to have his mind "at any tyme declare her selfe at her best case."

The question is whether or not "too much love of Learning is in fault...." But this, he says emphatically, would not be cause enough to make him decide upon his present course of life. For he admits that he has been no more immune than other men to "all the fond hopes that forward Youth & Vanitie are fledge with together with Gaine, pride, & ambition...." "The meer love of learning," he says, "could not have held out thus long against so strong opposition on the other side of every kind...." Besides, learning that has no higher end in mind but curiosity he calls a sin, "a poor regardlesse & unprofitable sin of curiosity." He will not be held chargeable with such a point of view. He says that he has not "given up my selfe to dreame away my yeares...like Endymion with the Moone...." He is conscious of the danger in his present course of life. He knows it could fall to the level of mere curiosity and become that "whereby a man cutts him selfe off from all action...." He states his conviction of "that which all mortals most aspire to either to defend & be useful to his friends, or to offend

his enemies." Helpful action is the purpose which he considers that men's lives should have.

Even if he had a "naturall proneness" toward learning, he says, this would not be powerful enough in itself to make him choose as he has done. He admits to the normal human desire for a family, "a much more potent inclination & inbred which about this tyme of a mans life sollicitis most.. .." To this is added the fact that "a desire of honour & repute & immortall fame seated in the breast of every true scholar" would make him want to produce results--the scholars form of action--as promptly as possible if learning was the only end he had in mind.

Then he comes to what it is that has confirmed him in the decision he has made. Not learning but the charge that Christ has placed on every Christian to consider the talent God has given him. Christ has given the whetstone to sharpen Milton's thoughts about his life. He declares outright now that the love of learning is "the persuit of something good" when "it would sooner follow the more excellent & supreme good knowne & praesented...." The pursuit of learning must be based on Christ's command. When it has that basis then it brings forth good and is:

quickly diverted from the emptie & fantastick
chase of shadows & notions to the solid good
flowing from due & tymely obedience to that
command in the gospell set out by the terrible
seasing of him that hid the talent.

For Milton, learning had to be the handmaid of the Lord. What gives him security in his decision on his course of life is

that the thought of Christ controls his other thoughts. The first decision he has made is to be obedient to Christ at any cost, and in order to do that he must consider his talents very carefully. He has not forgotten "the terrible seasing of him that hid the talent." On the contrary, his loyalty to Christ has made his decision on his course of life more difficult. It would have been easier to pay the lesser price for gaine, pride, useful action, honour and repute and even family. What constrained him was "this very consideration of that great commandment...." He was afraid that in all those other ways his talent might be hid.

It must have been a difficult decision to make with such a command regarding talents uppermost in mind. It would have been easy for a lesser man to make mistakes. But viewed in retrospect it hardly seems likely that Milton's decision was less than correct, even in the light of Christ's command. Milton had no such retrospect to help him, however, and in the sentence which closes the substance of his thoughts there is a tremulous quality that suggests a certain shyness and a kind of awe over the fact that he has felt led by Christ to such a course:

it is more probable therfore that not the endlesse delight of speculation but this very consideration of that great commandment does not presse forward as soone as may be to undergoe but keeps off with a sacred reverence, & religious advisement how best to undergoe not taking thought of beeing late so it give advantage to be more fit, for those that were latest lost nothing when the maister of the vinyard came to give each one his hire.

The sonnet which Milton incorporated in the letter does "com in not altogether unfitly." He refers to it as "som of

my nightward thoughts some while since," and thereby gives evidence that this decision had been seriously on his mind for some time past. The sonnet too begins with the thoughts of waste time and wasted talents and ascends from a troubled mind concerning these to an affirmation of faith that life in time is linked with God in heaven. The underlying contrast that is implied is between the way time deals with nature and the way time deals with him. Time in its passing seasons brings the fruits of nature to bud and blossom and grow to ripeness but time for him shows all the signs of being a thief who steals his youth without helping him produce any fruits to show.

So it appears. But in the seventh line the thought arcs suddenly and the whole movement of the poem begins to change. Time, year, days, spring, bud, blossom, his youth itself are all but semblances in relation to the truth. For it is "inward ripeness" that defines his life, not outward semblances, and there are "some more timely-happy spirits" that manifest an inward ripeness to the world. The insight that affects the thought now is that truth and that which is inwardly related to it, the spirits of good men, is what gives time its character where men are involved. To stand in right relation with the truth will bring time into that relation too.

The thought of the octet moves toward this understanding; that of the sestet affirms and amplifies it. The thought moves much as the Psalmists' thoughts so often did, from the con-

findings of a troubled heart to the expression of inward assurance that God is with him through every hour and day that time provides. He must move to the rhythm that God gives his life in time:

...less or more, or soon or slow,
...still in strictest measure ev'n

The signs to which he had first given his attention in the poem are seen now not to be the ones that count. By looking at them he had begun to misread himself and time. The one sign that makes life meaningful is the sense of being in rhythm with God's will. When that sign is present the other signs will be seen to be alright. It does not matter "however mean, or high," one's life and work may prove to be. What matters is that the life be lived with God. Then time and heaven lead toward one end. The line "Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n;" expresses a belief in human destiny, and the poem pauses to give weight to this.

Finally, all that time holds for personal life is reaffirmed to be in a dependent relation to Christ's eternal watchfulness: "All is.../As ever...."

The help which the watchful and demanding Master gives is sure; God's grace is sure; the condition for finding this to be so in life is to act with virtue, that is, take actual steps of faith that are in harmony with His grace. A person has to employ the human abilities he has been given if he is to discover that his life is governed by his relationship to

God.

The whole movement of the poem from the conception of a time that seemed without God to that of a time that is seen to have him present, and the consciousness that it is an inward development in relationship with God that gives life the quality of human grace which it can have and which one must employ, should make the reader ask whose eye is spoken of in the lines:

All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great task Masters eye.

The Master who is meant, I think, is Christ. He is the one who brought a heavenly power to earth and made it possible for men to be renewed and have effectual human grace of character again. And he is the one who sometimes took men to task. The poem is an expression of Christian faith and it is to the Master of that faith that Milton could be expected to have turned. It is the movement of a person's life toward some good end that concerns him in the poem, and that end could reasonably be expected to be the coming of the kingdom heaven willed. That is what has always justified the relationship of time to heaven in Christian thought. And that is what Christ wanted men to be concerned with when he spoke

⁴Strong wrote of this poem that "here is a great mind and a great heart not ignorant of its own powers, yet humbly waiting its appointed task" (230). I would say "preparing for," but Strong expresses very well the spirit which the poem conveys.

of talents and of taking heed. It was Christ who set men their great task--to prepare for the coming of the kingdom he would bring. And I feel confident that it was that task which Milton had in mind. Chapters 24 and 25 of the Gospel of Matthew give the background for such a point of view. They show the stress that Jesus placed on man's need to work and watch in preparation for the kingdom's coming. The parable of the talents is included there as one of the parables relating man's life to the coming of the kingdom of God. The key passages in relationship to Milton's thought are those identical ones which contain the master's reply to the faithful servants. The passage is given in verse 21 and repeated word for word in verse 23.

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.'"

For Christians that master had become the same as Christ. The parable of the talents has its shorter parallel in Mark 13:32-37.

"But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning--lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."

There would seem to be some reason for Milton to have thought of Christ as a great task Master in connection with the sub-

ject of his poem. There is evidence that Christ's life and work and influence had a special place in Milton's thinking since the writing of the Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity. The "Letter to a Friend", which was written no more than a few months after the writing of the sonnet, shows that he thought of his chosen way of life as an act of Christian dedication and that it was "that great commandment" given in the parable of the talents which had so influenced him. The sonnet, then, appears to depend upon the view that Milton's sense of dedication and personal destiny was closely associated in his mind with Christ. Milton would appear to be saying in the sonnet that the person who is dedicated to working out his life as his watchful task Master Christ empowers him to do will have the assurance that what he does relates his life to a kingdom that endures.

The letter and the sonnet together make it clear how firm Milton's single loyalty had become and the unique form he felt this loyalty must take in view of the talents that he discerned within himself. He was to dedicate himself to leisured preparation for a work to come. The evidence from his works up to this time suggests that he was unusually well prepared to use such leisure well. The wide-ranging interests of his earliest youth had found their center through his fresh insight into the significance of Christ. That his first step after that had been to overreach himself in attempting the writing of The Passion must have helped him bring a sense of realism to his plans. That he had achieved a sense of Christian liberty was made evident both by the

serene quality of his attitude toward death in the epitaphs and by the unpossessive joy which L'Allegro and Il Penseroso expressed. This sense of Christian liberty took the happy form of a liberality of spirit toward the world which is sometimes the consequence of faith. But it took the form of dedication too, as the Elegia Sexta, the Seventh Prologue and the "Letter" and accompanying sonnet made plain. They show how carefully this dedication had been thought through. And so, when Milton went to his father's country home in Horton sometime around July, 1632, it was as though his going was an affirmation of his faith that the peace Christ brought is real and given men to make the hope of promised bliss a living one--a hope that can affect their lives. The works that Milton wrote during the period at Horton indicate that in the midst of all his studies Milton was seeking to discover ways to make a dedicated art of life. In doing so, his own long leisure bore some fruit for ours.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTENDED HARMONY: EARLY HORTON POEMS

Several of the poems which Milton wrote at Horton deal with the theme of promised harmony and the means whereby this harmony may become a living hope for men. The poems On Time, Upon the Circumcision, At a Solemn Music and even Arcades¹ will mean much more if the reader has some knowledge of the view of harmony still prevalent in Milton's day. The simplest presentation of this subject is Tillyard's Elizabethan World Picture, a work even more orderly than the subject about which he writes.² Many of Milton's earlier poems had involved the conception of heavenly and earthly harmony. Naturam Non Pati Senium and the Second Prolusion were almost entirely dependent on it, and it also figures in the thought of poems like De Idea Platonica and parts of other works, such as the last main section of the Seventh Prolusion. It is an important but subordinate conception in the Nativity Ode, especially in stanzas xii, xiv and xv, where it is given

¹No one has been able to do more than say that these poems belong to the early years in Horton. I accept this order as a convenient one. They all appear to have been written in 1632 or 1633. See LR I:278-279 & 226 and V:376-377.

²See also Svendsen, Milton and Science. Lovejoy's Great Chain of Being, is, of course, a most important contribution to this whole subject. Considerable attention has been given recently to this aspect of Milton's thought. Schultz, Milton and Forbidden Knowledge, perhaps best conveys the Christian temper that prevailed in nearly all such views in Milton's time. Cf. Whiting, Milton's Literary Milieu.

the same strong Christian emphasis as in three of the earlier Horton poems.

To borrow an excellent phrase of Tillyard, the Elizabethan concept of universal order was "at once cosmic and domestic." God's order was held to influence everything and to influence one's personal life at every point. To Hooker's concept of God's universally governing law the Elizabethans added a concept of immense vitality. The order animated life, and most of that which was ordered in the universe was instinct with life. Partly following Plato's Republic and Timmaeus, partly the later Neoplatonists, and using this inheritance as it had been given its elaborate Christian form by medieval thinkers, the Elizabethans had a somewhat simplified conception of God's heaven and his entire creation as a descending chain of being, each link with a vital influence on the other. This mutual influence, however, was not necessarily restricted to a simple descending order, nor indeed was the order entirely unified. A helpful oversimplification of the whole idea is quoted by Tillyard as given by an encyclopaedist whose work had been printed by Caxton:

God formed the world all round like as a pellet
the which is all round; and he made the heaven
all round which environeth and goeth round about
the earth on all parts wholly without any default,
all in like wise as the shell of an egg that environeth the white all about. And so the heaven
goeth round about an air which is above the air,
the which in Latin is called hester (i.e., aether).

And, as Tillyard adds, "immediately outside the egg is God's heaven" (p.41). Of the usually ten spheres that constituted the created universe, the outermost one, the "primum mobile"

determined the motions of the rest. The sphere of the moon was the dividing point between the pure and immutable above and the impure and changeable below. As Tillyard says, the earth was "the cesspool of the universe," the gross center of it all. There were nine hierarchies of angels, said to regulate the nine spheres, so that men have their guardian angels too. Nature, however, in all her parts responds to God's ordering influence instinctively. The angels in the spheres of the heavens make notes of music which men once heard but no longer are able to since the Fall. The stars--the planets--break up the pure harmony by the influence they have on all below them. They intrude the element of fortune or chance into the lower sphere in accordance with God's will that this should now be so. Fate, then, is a factor in men's lives as in the physical universe because of man's disobedience. The man who is careless about his relationship with God will be especially prone to the influence of the stars. Below the stars are the elements, in descending order of purity; fire, air, water, earth, in a constant state of flux but over which God decreed some degree of mutable order. The balance of these elements determines the amount of balance in any part of nature.

Man is microcosm corresponding, more or less exactly, to the macrocosm of the created universe. His physical body has its humours based on the elements in him. His highest faculty, reason, is intended to control his other faculties and to enable him to know his relation to the universe and

God. Given the evidence provided by the mind, the will could act.

Both for man and the sublunary creation, the Fall and sin have complicated everything. The universal order exists and man still stands in a dependent relation to it, but it is not his order any more except insofar as God in his Providence does not permit chaos to become complete. The world now is sustained by "the perpetual pressure of his Providence," so that man may yet be saved from final chaos by Christ's incarnation and atoning act, as well as by the renewed possibility of understanding the created order aright.

To understand the created order is to discover the correspondences that exist between the macrocosm of creation and the microcosm, man. This helps man understand the support he has from creation itself and helps him find stronger support for the ordering of his own life. His hope is that the motion of his individual life will tend to correspond with the eternal motion, the rhythm, the cosmic dance of all that is. And the living hope is that by Christ's intervention and man's own renewal he will at last join the eternal dance and hear and have a voice in the heavenly harmony.

No doubt such conceptions were often "domesticated" in the same way that our Sunday service concept of religion often is today. Yet there is considerable evidence that such conceptions had somewhat more than a semi-superstitious hold upon men's minds. And it is certain that some men were

so affected by the initiating thought behind such conceptions that they could adapt the conceptions themselves rather freely to their purposes, not unlike the way that Plato himself seems to have done. Milton was one of those who made an adaptive use of the Elizabethan world picture. That picture does contribute to his thinking but only at one or two points does it seem to have a controlling influence over it. One of those points is man's vision of the promised harmony.

The poem On Time deals with the fundamental fact of the temporal decay and death of men and contrasts this fact with an eternal freshness and permanence to come. The poem is virtually a climax to Milton's earlier treatments of the theme of death and forms almost a sequel to Shakespeare's Sonnet cxlvi, in which he wrote:

Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth,

 Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,

 Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
 Within be fed, without be rich no more.
 So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
 And death once dead, there's no more dying then.
 (1, 3, 11-14)

Milton's poem turns our attention to those "terms divine."

For Milton it is time whose "womb devours." The poem begins with the same conception of racing time as that with which the sonnet, "How soon hath time," began. But in the present poem Milton's thought advances much more boldly:

Fly envious Time, till thou run out thy race,
 Call on the lazy leaden-stepping hours,
 Whose speed is but the heavy Plummets' pace;
 (1-3)

Time is seen to "fly," but the hours are "leaden-stepping"--their speed is that of the back and forth motion of the pendulum. Time, in other words, is racing nowhere. Something has happened to make the race of time toward death, in its effectiveness, stand still.

The same boldness of thought is evident in the conception of time glutting itself as a womb that devours: be your most hideous, he is saying of time--you can only permanently entomb the bad and ultimately be self-consumed. For, he boldly affirms, what time's womb devours

...is no more than what is false and vain,
And merely mortal dross;
So little is our loss.
So little is thy gain. (5-8)

Again, this is the boldness of the Christian man who knows his liberty. And it is bold -- "mortal dross" Milton says, where God had said in Genesis:

"In the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:19)

The Christian now knows no such end for man:

For when as each thing bad thou hast entomb'd,
And, last of all, thy greedy self consum'd,
Then long Eternity shall greet our bliss
With an individual kiss;
And Joy shall overtake us as a flood, (9-13)

This is that occasion which Milton spoke of in the Ode when, following Christ's coming as the Judge,

...then at last our bliss
Full and perfect is....

It should be noted that Milton does not say that everything mortal is bad but that time can only permanently entomb "what is false and vain,"--"mortal dross." It is only "each thing bad" that will have a final end. For,

...everything that is sincerely good
And perfectly divine,
With Truth, and Peace, and Love, shall ever shine
(14-16)

Milton's thought, and the action of his mind agrees with that which Paul had urged Christians to:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:
immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and
covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of
these the wrath of God is coming. In these you
once walked, when you lived in them. But now
put them all away.... (Col. 3:5-8).

Milton was doing just this in the poem, in disdain of time, and setting his mind on things above, as Paul had counseled men to do: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). But for Milton the joy that we have a foretaste of in the genuine pleasures of our life on earth will, in eternity, be full and complete. Nothing good will be left out--"everything...sincerely good.../ shall ever shine."

The conception is conveyed with a great deal of warmth. We shall be greeted with a kiss, ours individually and such as to unite us undividably with God. The thought of the whole section following line 11 is expressed with almost an excess of simplicity, as much as to say that we shall have the same childlike purity of being as the "Infant God" whose

coming was celebrated in the Ode. Significantly, what He brought--"Truth, and Peace, and Love"--is what "everything that is sincerely good" will shine among.

The vision is one of eternal rest about God's throne. But, in keeping with the simplicity of the whole conception of eternal life given in the poem, the sight of God that men shall have is not Dante's beatific vision but the gentler "happy-making sight alone." This is just one of many indications in Milton's early poems that he found a deep contentment with the joys of earth that made him think of heaven as a better earth. It is a sign of the tremendous independence of Milton's mind, like Shakespeare's own, that he could cherish the heavenly vision so and love the earth so much and yet be non-mystical in his regard for both. That others could not always hold their Christian own against the inroads of a still rampant Neoplatonism, men like Traherne and most of the Cambridge Platonists attest.

This eternal happiness is to come about "When once our heav'nly-guided soul shall climb," (19). The expression suggests that the soul acts freely but that it cannot act without God's guiding power. The notion of the soul's need to climb with God's help became a common Protestant one. Milton, however, seems to have been influenced by Dante at this point, and would have been familiar with the view of Revelation:

To him that overcometh will I grant to
sit with me in my throne, even as I also
overcame, and am set down with my Father
in his throne. (KJV, Rev. 3:21)

The final consequence of the attainment of eternal life is that:

Then all this Earthy grossness quit,
Attir'd with Stars, we shall for ever sit,
Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee
O Time. (20-22)

The thought that comes to mind at once is that of 1 Corinthians:

For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is thy victory?"

O death, where is thy sting?"

(1 Cor. 15:53-55)

To be "attir'd with Stars" in eternity may be a bold suggestion that the stars, the supposedly fateful influence over man, will then be made to serve him. Revelation, however, contains an interesting parallel: "And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;" (Rev. 12:1). Milton would have been affected too by the close of Dante's Il Paradiso. In Barbara Reynold's recent translation of this it is with a not dissimilar affirmation that the final canto affectingly closes:

High phantasy lost power and here broke off;
Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly, free from jars,
My will and my desire were turned by love,

The love that moves the sun and the other stars.
(xxxiii:142-145)

In the last line of the poem On Time, Milton makes explicit what was clear all along--that the eternal triumph

of man will be over death and chance as well as time.

I do not know what Warton could have wanted "more plain and intelligible" (Todd, IV:276). The poem is a pure song of faith. To address time in such tones is perhaps as close as one can come by means of art to express the infant power of Christ in human life. By contrast, Shakespeare's sonnet directs attention to the sinful self, while Milton's poem lifts the mind's eye to the living hope beyond our sin.

To see the vision of heavenly harmony is something. To see the palpable means by which man can re-establish living contact with this vision is more. The poem Upon the Circumcision concerns the earthly means God chose to make man's link with heaven alive for him. The clarity of the conception of Christ's work is what stands out. No one can say so much in so few lines so forcefully unless he has a luminous insight into what his own convictions on the subject really are. Milton, for example, was far ahead of what Keats was to be in his settled judgments at a comparable age. It is rare for any poet to see so well so young. Milton's insight on the subject of Christ has the force of felt conviction.

The poem begins as an address to those same "glittering ranks with wings display'd" who first brought the sound of heavenly harmony to the shepherds in the Ode:

Ye flaming Powers, and winged Warriors bright,
That erst with Music, and triumphant song
First heard by happy watchful Shepherds' ear,
So sweetly sung your Joy the Clouds along

(1-4)

We see here Milton's reliance on the conception of the spheres, of which the sixth was said to have been regulated by the Powers. They are "flaming" because the ether, the pure air of the Spheres was thought of as fiery. The Warriors were probably the "helmed Cherubim/ And sworded Seraphim" of the Ode. They belonged to the highest orders of angels and regulated the highest spheres. The notion thus is, as in the Ode, of a music of the spheres.

But the angels are alive in their singing, and Milton's admonition to them is to change their joy to sorrow:

Now mourn; and, if sad share with us to bear
Your fiery essence can distill no tear,
Burn in your sighs,... (6-8)

This is a daring Christian conception of the kind of correspondence Christ brought about between the heavenly orders and the earthly order. The conception is that now, because of Christ's mediating power, the heavenly beings can even be affected by man--who in heaven was to have a place above the angels--and that they might even

...borrow
Seas wept from our deep sorrow: (8-9)

Milton is perfectly consistent concerning their presumed nature, and realizes that they can probably only "burn" in their "sighs" because of their "fiery essence."

The whole passage expresses that excess of grief which men may be supposed to have a right to feel over Christ's suffering--"Seas wept from our deep sorrow." But the contrast with the grief which Milton sought to express in The Passion could not be more complete. There the man Jesus was

isolated in his suffering and the poet isolated in his grief. Given such a conception of utter isolation from heavenly influence, Milton at least tried to be consistent in his recognition that such a death of an infinitely valued "single One" would call for a bottomless, unfathomable grief on the poet's part. But here such a misconception has been utterly rejected. Now the suffering and the grief, the life of Christ and man, are in direct relationship with heaven, from which alone the significance of the suffering and the grief derives. Christ and man are not alone in an empty universe--behind them all the content of heaven gives meaning and direction to what happens to them here on earth. That is why the powers of heaven can be expected to sigh. It is with that meaning and direction that the poem proceeds.

He, who with all Heav'n's heraldry whilere
 Enter'd the world, now bleeds to give us ease;
(10-11)

Christ was part of the heavenly pageant of the Angels' song. But born into earth--our cause for joy and heaven's cause too because man was intended to be "attir'd with stars"--Christ now "bleeds" to make man's suffering more bearable: not erase, but "ease." It is our sin that makes his suffering necessary.

Alas, how soon our sin
 Sore doth begin
 His Infancy to seize! (12-14)

Christ must be "seized" by the consequences of our sin if we are to be freed from sin. In accordance with the "recapitulation" theory of Irenaeus, but even more with the New Tes-

tament writings themselves, Christ, though sinless, must experience the effects of sin, including death, in order to free man from them. Because of man's disobedience, God in the justice of his law has decreed that man should suffer while on earth and die. Christ, in choosing to become completely human, is subject to the consequences of this law which man's disobedience caused to become applicable to the innocent as well as the guilty, even to the extent of causing nature, under man's governance, to be subject to this law as well. There was no way past this law except through Christ:

O more exceeding love or law more just?
 Just law indeed, but more exceeding love!
 (15-16)

In other words, would "more exceeding love" make "just law" dispensable? No, "just law" would be fulfilled by "more exceeding love." Christ, in the fulness of his love for us, would take upon himself the consequences of our disobedience --suffering and death. And so, in accordance with the recapitulation theory (or with the New Testament belief), Jesus was circumcised as part of the fulfilling of the law, so that man would be freed from the bondage to the law which his disobedience required. Milton's thought concerning the effectiveness of Jesus' circumcision was consonant with that given in Colossians:

In him also you were circumcised with a
 circumcision made without hands, by putting
 off the body of flesh in the circumcision
 of Christ. (Col. 2:11)

It is the Son's "more exceeding love"--God's own love--that brings about this fulfillment of obedience to the law and man's deliverance. To show this, Milton then describes our human condition apart from Christ and who it is that works his love for us.

For we by rightful doom remediless
Were lost in death, till he that dwelt above
High thron'd in secret bliss, for us frail dust
Emptied his glory, ev'n to nakedness; (17-20)

In other words, we were the "frail dust" of Genesis and "lost in death"- ourselves the "mortal dross" of the poem On Time-until God's now infant Son came to take away the power of death to hold us.

It is interesting to note the stress that Milton puts on Christ's humanity. When the divine Son came to earth he "emptied his glory, ev'n to nakedness." It is probably not necessary to attribute to Milton a definite doctrine of kenosis on the basis of this passage. He may have held such a view but the phrase, as it is given in Philippians, has been given different interpretations:

...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:5-7)

In a similar way, Milton's doctrine of the atonement cannot be precisely established from the passage which follows except within certain limits:

And that great Cov'nant which we still transgress
Entirely satisfi'd,
And the full wrath beside
Of vengeful Justice bore for our excess,
(21-24)

The covenant is that given to Moses in the Ten Commandments, as in Exodus 34:28. However, Milton would have been thinking of the covenant relationship of man with God. For God in the Old Testament was a covenant God: it was not just the Ten Commandments but what lay behind them and was also expressed in other covenants of God with his people that was important--the obedience that God required of man. Thus, in Genesis 9:1-17, God made a covenant with Noah, which included the injunctions not to eat the blood of flesh or to shed man's blood. More significant for Christians was the covenant God made with Abraham, as given in Genesis 17:7,9-11.

And I will establish my covenant between
me and you and your descendants after you...
for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you....
This is my covenant, which you shall keep,
between me and you and your descendants after
you: every male among you shall be circumcised...
and it shall be a sign of the covenant between
me and you.

In other words, the "great Cov'nant" was basically man's required obedience to God, of which circumcision had been for the Jews a sign or sealing of their agreement to be obedient.³

It was our broken obedience which Christ re-established between man and God, of which his own circumcision was it-

³Davies states that the covenant relationship "characterized Separatist and Puritan religion as an engagement of the heart in the service of Christ and His Church, as distinguished from a creed stating the faith in intellectual propositions." (The English Free Churches, 38).

self regarded as a sign: "And seals obedience first with wounding smart" (25). Christ's human obedience is the controlling thought of the doctrine of the atonement given in this poem (and that is in accordance with Irenaeus' recapitulation theory). Christ showed his love for man by emptying his glory and becoming man. He showed his love for God by being perfectly obedient as a man to God. This delimits but does not precisely define Milton's doctrine of the atonement. The conception Milton expresses has many points of origin in the New Testament, among which is the passage in Philippians following that which says that Christ "emptied himself:"

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:8)

The statement which follows this in turn helps to make it clear why the basic conception of the earlier Ode would have been so prominently in Milton's mind--because every man and everything in heaven and earth is to bow in worship before Christ as Lord:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

But something more can be said concerning Milton's conception of the atonement beyond the fact that he bases it on obedience as the form of Christ's love for God. In spite of his strong interest in the incarnation as the initiating

factor in the ability of "the corruptible to put on incorruptibility," Milton did not follow the Christian Neoplatonists in the logical consequences of this belief: he did not believe that man simply begins to become deified.⁴ For Milton, the atonement was the decisive act that made man's renewal and salvation possible. It is important to see this in view of his strong interest in Platonic doctrine, which would not necessitate such an atoning act. The distinction is indeed a vital one, and deserves to be clarified. Put most simply, the Reformed tradition of Protestantism affirmed that what took place for man in the atonement begins to be effectual in an individual's life when he makes an act of faith--a commitment of the mind and heart--in response to what God has done for him in Christ. For Milton, faith as knowledge and commitment was a controlling factor not only in receiving salvation but in having any vision of the heavenly harmony as well.

For Augustine faith was a controlling factor too, although it did not always lead to such a stress on the atonement. Part of the reason probably was that Augustine had more difficulty than Milton in freeing himself from Neoplatonic modes of thought (I am still not sure that he ever fully did). For some time at least, Augustine believed somewhat as follows: God is all good; all that exists is

⁴ I.e., the "'physical' or 'mystical' theory (we have already come across it in Irenaeus) which linked the redemption with the incarnation. According to this, human nature was sanctified, transformed and elevated by the very act of Christ's becoming man" (Kelly, 375).

good, so far as it has existence; evil is the absence of good, so that absolute evil would be absolute non-existence. This was Plotinus' view also. The view involves "an extreme form of divine immanence. Only as men and things are in God or he in them have they any existence" (McGiffert, History, II:86-87). Augustine, however, was not a pantheist, because God had created all that he remained immanent within. The view was to have important parallels (and differences) in Milton's thought.

The virtue of Augustine's view-shared by Milton's also-- was that the benefits of salvation were stressed more than the urgent need to escape eternal death, although Augustine certainly did not forget what that condition of death was like. Those benefits of salvation were much like those that Milton held in view: a vision of God or heavenly harmony, and obedience to his will. For Augustine, the vision could be limitedly real by means of mystic contemplation, a view not clearly shared by Milton. But Augustine is credited with influencing western Christendom to give prominence to the active and practical life, because of his insistence that obedience to God was itself an end, and in this respect too Milton was much indebted to Augustine.

But this is where the points of similarity begin to end. It seems quite clear to me that Augustine also gave to western Christendom, especially to Protestant thought, a rather rigid conception of an other-worldly orientation which Milton did not share. This is hard to demonstrate without go-

ing beyond the reasonable limits of the present work. The difference can be seen in Augustine's self-torment over sin, a condition Milton shows almost no signs of having had. There was a straining after purification of life in Augustine, as there often was in later Protestant movements, which was not part of Milton's religious attitude. It has to be said--the evidence is there--Milton was not sufficiently self-pre-occupied to take this view. Bunyan's Christian would have been an alien figure to Milton even in his youth. Milton looked out on the macrocosm and beyond to God. He seemed to feel that to comprehend whatever harmony was there would cause a corresponding harmony to begin within the microcosm of man himself. The courage to believe this came through the incarnate Christ. The conviction that this harmony was now a living hope came through the belief that the atonement was such an act as to make harmony--perfect obedience of man with God--a reality in one man's life, so that other men could begin to comprehend this harmony themselves. Augustine contributed a great deal to Milton's thought. But he did not follow Augustine at some of the most essential points--the Neoplatonic conception of the good, the conception of the vision as mystical, the special preoccupation with the microcosm of the self, nor did he follow those who gave controlling importance to the incarnation above the atoning act. On these matters Milton was more consistent after writing

the Ode than Augustine appears to me to have been.

There is no evidence in the poem Upon the Circumcision that Milton held the "ransom" theory of atonement, whereby Christ by his death gave Satan what was due him for the release of men (also part of Irenaeus' view). Quite the contrary, Milton's view appears to be very close to that of the chief opponent of the ransom theory, the eleventh century theologian, Anselm. Anselm's theory was that Christ made satisfaction for man's sins. Anselm's doctrine is a "satisfaction" theory, not a "ransom" or a "penal" one. Christ is not punished for man's wrong in place of man. He is obedient, "even unto death," and his obedience makes satisfaction for man's sins and makes punishment unnecessary. The vital factor in the theory is Christ's free-will. He did not have to die, being obedient to God. But he chose to do so, in obedience to man's need. And by doing so he "satisfied" the demand of God's justice for perfect obedience on the part of man. As a consequence, when they acknowledge Christ's sovereignty, men are recognized by God as if obedient.

⁵ Maurice deWulf's interpretation of Augustine clarifies the extensive influence of Neoplatonic conceptions on his thought (History, I:80-92). See also Gilson's excellent summary recognition of the widespread influence of Neoplatonism upon Augustine's thought (70 & 80-81). But other studies rightly stress the positive contributions Augustine made, which are immense. Besides, Augustine's thought was in a state of continual development, as any seminal mind must be. Therefore what we say of him in one place may prove wrong in the next. The same difficulty in interpretation has always applied to Plato's thought as well. Such men set out to illuminate and quicken and not to codify our minds. Milton knew this better than anyone.

The main contrast of this view was with that of the Eastern tradition of Christendom, where Christ's work was often thought of in "physical" and mystical terms, whereas Anselm's view was dominantly ethical. But we cannot speak simply of Eastern and Western way of looking at the work Christ did. There have always been those who have been prone to think of the effects of salvation in physical or mystical terms, of the deification of flesh or the spiritualization of matter. This means that there has always been a danger of failing to distinguish between God and the redeemed man. The influence can be traced not only in the works of several major thinkers but through devoted men like Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroeck and the later German Brethren, as well as through the less systematic Neoplatonizing of the Italian writers, straight into the life and thought of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Given Milton's interest in the incarnation and in the renewal of man's life, of which the incarnation was for him so sure a promise, and given his intense interest in the heavenly harmony, it is remarkable that Milton was so free from such influences. The controlling difference for Milton seems to have been his conception of Christ. In this conception he was clearly indebted to Anselm as well as to Irenaeus. McGiffert appears to have spoken accurately of Anselm when he wrote:

In this connection attention may be called to Anselm's statement (De fide trinitatis, 4) that in the incarnation man was brought into union not with the divine nature but with a divine person, the Son of God. "For he who rightly understands

his incarnation, believes that he took man up into a unity not of nature but of person." The difference of emphasis between this and the eastern idea of salvation through deification is very marked. (History, II:199, n. 1)

To be brought into union with a divine person requires for its efficacy an atoning act. But the interpretation of that atoning act need not coincide with that of Anselm, although he gave to Christianity one of its most influential views.

The Protestant view of the atonement that prevailed in the Reformed tradition, and in England too, was that of Calvin. It is not unlike Anselm's theory and is dependent on it, but may be more properly called a "penal" view--unlike Anselm's view, in the reformed interpretation Christ bore the punishment of the guilty. It is not absolutely necessary to interpret Milton's lines "And the full wrath beside/ Of vengeful Justice bore for our excess" to mean a punishment borne by Christ instead of a satisfaction made. But it seems overwhelmingly likely that, being Protestant in England, he meant just that, along with much more. The view of the Reformed tradition is succinctly stated by Calvin in a passage of his Institutes. It was necessary, Calvin wrote,

that man, who had ruined himself by his own disobedience, should remedy his condition by obedience, should satisfy the justice of God, and suffer the punishment of his sin. Our Lord then made his appearance as a real man; he put on the character of Adam, and assumed his name, to act as his substitute in his obedience to the Father, to lay down our flesh as the price of satisfaction to the justice of God; and to suffer the punishment which we had deserved, in the same nature in which the offence had been committed. (Bk. II, 3. Vol. I:508)

Calvin's statement here lacks reference to what was for Milton in his poem the over-riding fact that this was an act of

Christ's "more exceeding love." To be fair, however, for Calvin and his followers in their practice of religion, the conception took on a much warmer tone. In fact, a passage from one of the Genevan Forms of Prayer shows both a similarity with Milton's view and a marked difference in the fervent sense of worried strain instead of calm, even in prayer:

Us thou hast honoured with a more excellent covenant on which we may lean, that covenant which thou didst establish in the right hand of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and which thou wast pleased should be written in his blood and sealed with his death. Wherefore, O Lord, renouncing ourselves and abandoning all other hope, we flee to this precious covenant by which our Lord Jesus Christ, offering his own Body to thee in sacrifice, has reconciled us to thee. Look, therefore, O Lord, not on us but on the face of Christ, that by his intercession thy anger may be appeased, and thy face may shine forth upon us for our joy and salvation....
(Calvin, Tracts, ii. 109 quoted in Whale, 89-90)

Milton too was conscious that "we still transgress." But he seems more secure in his assurance that the new covenant brought effectual power. His calm of faith even when dealing with such hard facts as Jesus' death suggest that Milton gave greater balance to his view of the atonement by underscoring it with the conviction that at least the peace which Jesus' incarnation brought continued here on earth as an effectual power. The poem Upon the Circumcision conveys a sense of certainty that completely controls the sorrow. The sorrow is there, as a sense of deep regret that Christ had to "bleed" and be wounded and come to the worst there is for men. The poem closes with a full consciousness of the course the incarnate life actually took:

And seals obedience first with wounding smart
 This day; but Oh! ere long
 Huge pangs and strong
 Will pierce more near his heart. (25-28)

But the suggestion of the final line that Christ's entire nature suffered for man places the poem in an atmosphere of gratitude, which is in fact the atmosphere of the whole poem. The final effect of the poem is to convey the feeling that men need to sorrow over the fact that the incarnate Lord had to move all through his life toward death. But the emphasis in the poem that "more exceeding love" is enacting a real change for men also makes the poem convey the sense that the necessary sorrow must soon give way again to the joy that had been sung by the angels and already heard by "happy watchful Shepherds' ear." The nature of that looked for joy which Christ's suffering makes possible becomes the subject of a subsequent poem.

⁶ It should not be puzzling that Milton drew many different thoughts into one moving whole. From the New Testament period onward this was always the way that Christian thought progressed. The overlapping of different views of Christ's nature and work in the same interpreter's mind has always been part of the pattern of Christian thought and must always cause some consternation to those who want to separate the course of theology into simple and distinct theories. It can seldom be done, as any competent history of doctrines will show. It is not that men's minds are necessarily muddled but that the facts are too immense to be contained in words. That is why most good theologies are like a prism: all they can do is reflect different surfaces of the jewel of Christian truth contained in one triune God and in that God's coming to earth in one man's life and death and resurrection and the consequences of his acts for man. What is remarkable is that Milton could say so much about these facts so clearly and so well in so few words.

The poems On Time, Upon the Circumcision, and At a Solemn Music actually form a remarkable trilogy. In the first poem Milton confronts time with the assurance of its ultimate defeat. In the second he expresses with great precision how the victory comes about for men through one man's acts. In the third he presents the means whereby men can shape their lives by the living hope of an eternal life which this one man's victory assures them of. The means for such a life of hope is to use the forms of likeness to eternal life that are available to us on earth. To use them is to affirm our faith in what one man has done and live by the full assurance of his promise of a life to come. To live by such assurance of unseen, unheard reality is to live by faith, as Milton recognized that Christ has counseled men to do.

At a Solemn Music is a supreme poetic accomplishment. Its artistry is that of a man whose intricate convictions have matured into a complete simplicity of controlling design. There is hardly a verb, noun or adjective that does not contribute directly to the force of thought the poem is intended to convey. That force of thought concerns the power of the correspondence between heaven and earth. The first line makes the nature of the correspondence clear: "Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heav'n's joy," (1). "Blest" is the effectual form of "bliss" which has figured in poem after poem beginning with the Ode. Its use suggests a form of grace empowering the "pair". "Pair" itself suggests a har-

mony. This pair--music and poetry--is likened to the celestial Sirens described at the end of Plato's Republic. There each sits on one of the spheres and sounds a separate note which forms one harmony. Significantly, God himself listens to their song, so that in the poem, since the pair is "blest," it may be supposed that God hears their sound. They are "Sphere-born harmonious Sisters, Voice, and Verse," (2) But even though they had been given life in the spheres--as in Plato's doctrine man's soul also had been--Milton makes it clear at once that they are earth's sounds now, subject to the limitations of the earth. They are not "heav'n's joy," they are "pledges of Heav'n's joy." Specifically, they are a sign that the promise of eternal life will be fulfilled and a means of grace to make that promise effectual in man's life. The poet asks them to

Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ
Dead things with inbreath'd sense able to pierce,
(4-5)

To "wed" is the loveliest conception of earthly harmony. The sounds are divinely inspired, not divine in themselves, for it is "mixt power" that they must employ--which I think is an allusion not just to their combination but also to the fact that the nature of the elements in the sublunary world limits even the power of voice and verse. Nevertheless they have a God-like power to grace "dead things with inbreath'd sense." As God formed man from the dead thing, dust, and breathed into him the breath of life, so voice and verse, as pledges, have the ability to awaken the power of grace in

that which otherwise seems lifeless.

The controlling words for this limiting interpretation of the nature and power of the "harmonious Sisters" are "pledges" in the first line and "phantasy" in the fifth: "And to our high-rai's'd phantasy present" (5) They are such signs of coming joy as can present to the imagination that is lifted up an "inbreath'd sense" of the heavenly harmony. Milton restricts the whole conception to the capacity of the imagination to be lifted to a belief in unseen reality. It is an act of faith that is proposed.

What is presented to the imagination is a likeness of

That undisturbed Song of pure concent,
Aye sung before the sapphire-colour'd throne
To him that sits thereon, (6-8)

As Newton noted, the "sapphire-colour'd throne" is the "appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" in the vision of Ezekiel (Ch. 1). It is interesting that in the vision to which Milton alludes, Ezekiel is explicit in saying that the vision is a likeness of the heavenly reality. Milton also was conscious that such depictions of heaven are likenesses. He would have thought of Revelation as well: "And I heard a voice from heaven.... The voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne" (Rev. 14:2-3).

The thrust of the poem to this point has been to quicken the belief that God hears the song of faith of those who lift up their imaginations to sing of his reality. The song so sung or heard is both a blessing and a form of praise,

for it is the everlasting singing of "Hymns devout and holy Psalms" that voice and verse are asked to present to the imagination that is lifted up. The New Testament repeatedly counseled men to look to the unseen things for inspiration. The first act of faith was to believe in Christ. The second and sustaining act was to turn the eyes of the imagination continually upward, "because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). It is this second act of faith that Milton deals with in his poem. He is proposing a means whereby faith may be sustained and itself become a sustaining influence. In the background of his thought, not as a direct source but as an originating influence, is the Psalmist's conception that to lift one's eyes to God with the aid of song is to be blessed with the influence of his sustaining power. Milton began to translate and paraphrase the Psalms at a very early age and poems like the present one suggest that he continued to be deeply affected by them. Such Psalms as number 121 would have encouraged him to stress the importance of lifting up the imagination and reflecting upon the relation of heaven and earth:

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
 From whence does my help come?
 My help comes from the Lord,
 who made heaven and earth.
 (121:1-2)

The "Song of pure concent" of which voice and verse are asked to give a vision is that of the saints singing to the accompaniment of the Angels' instruments.

With Sainly shout, and solemn Jubilee,
 Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
 Their loud up-lifting Angel-trumpets blow,
 And the Cherubic host in thousand quires
 Touch their immortal Harps of golden wires,
 With those just Spirits that wear victorious Palms,
 Hymns devout and holy Psalms
 Singing everlastingly; (9-16)

These lines convey the suggestion that the saints in eternity have a closer likeness to God than do the Angels.

Among the New Testament authorities for this was Hebrews 2: 1-9: "For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come.... As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus...." The picture which Milton presents, however, is that of Revelation 7 and 8.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude...standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb." And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders...Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. (Rev. 7:9-11. 8:2)

The poem suggests that the saints are present in heaven now, and in keeping with this idea they are referred to as "just Spirits". However, Milton may have been thinking of an eternal present to come, not of an immediate present. If so, the implication of the reference to them as "Spirits" is of a spiritual resurrection, not a bodily one. Either interpretation is possible.

The function of the vision that voice and verse are asked to present is to make the heavenly harmony appear so real that it influences the way men live their lives. That,

of course, was the function of the vision given in Revelation too. The development of this conception of a living hope, which the last half of the poem expresses, is intricate but clear. The entire conception depends upon the belief that all we can have now is a likeness to the heavenly harmony that has been promised us, but that to lift up the imagination to this likeness has the power to change our lives. Present our imaginations with a likeness of that "Song of pure concert," Milton requests

That we on Earth with undiscording voice
May rightly answer that melodious noise; (17-18)

The implication is that we can make some answer to a God who hears. That is, we answer the promise with the voice of faith. That is what was done in Psalm 66, and the Psalms appear to have been a direct influence on Milton's thought at this point:

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise!
.....
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
But truly God has listened; (66:1-2, 18-19)

There was, Milton says, a past time when our answer was not just that of faith but of reality; but sin broke the power of man and the whole sublunary realm of created nature to have direct participation in the heavenly harmony:

As once we did, till disproportion'd sin
Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din
Broke the fair music that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
In perfect Diapason, whilst they stood
In first obedience, and their state of good. (19-24)

The lines are poetically flawless in their rhythm and their intricate contrast of the act of breaking with the reality of the harmony broken. A complete doctrine of the Fall is compressed into six lines that are given an explosive power to move the reader with the sense of what was lost--love, and obedience to that. Part of the poetic triumph is that the lines are completely explicit without being in the least didactic. Sin "jarr'd" against nature's bell-like harmony, and "broke" the music that not just man but "all creatures made." They made this music to their Lord--thankful praise. Their "first obedience" was obedience to love, for love "sway'd" or gave them the rhythm of "perfect Diapason." Hughes notes how precisely the word Diapason fits the sense. He refers to the comparison made by the N.E.D. to Burton's Anatomy: "'A true correspondence, perfect amity, a diapason of vows and wishes' between friends." (Hughes, Minor Poems, 208, n.23). Very few statements of the doctrine of the Fall have given so sure a sense of what it was from which man fell--love, 'amity' with God.

The poem closes in a tone like that of prayer:

O may we soon again renew that Song,
And keep in tune with heav'n, till God ere long
To his celestial consort us unite, (25-27)

The expressed desire is to be renewed sufficiently to stay "in tune with Heav'n." The thought is that faith now becomes a living power by which we can prepare our lives for reunion with all that has eternal life with God. As it was for Paul, the full renewal is to come "soon again", but the

foretaste is given that we may prepare now. For Milton such a foretaste is offered by the "pledges of Heav'n's joy," the "blest" gifts of music and poetry, and the preparation this makes possible is the act of "high-rai's'd" faith that the promised harmony will come about. The poem, then, expresses the conviction that faith is the form of harmony we have on earth with God; to act upon that faith is to use the things of earth to raise the mind to God.

The nature and efficacy of faith is the controlling conception of the poem and is entirely biblical. The conception of the harmony of the spheres, partly drawn from Plato but apparently largely that which was current in Milton's day, is entirely subordinated to the Biblical conception of faith. The Biblical conception of the nature and efficacy of sustaining faith is expressed in many passages of the New Testament. It was, in turn, influenced by the strong Old Testament conviction that God responds to the man who prepares himself--though for Christians the only preparation comes through Christ. Psalm 24 presents the view prevalent in the Old Testament, a recognition that what is involved is both a personal preparation and blessing and a united one--the "we" of Milton's poem.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
 And who shall stand in his holy place?
 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
 who does not lift up his soul to what
 is false,....
 He will receive blessing from the Lord....

Lift up your heads, O gates!
 and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
 that the King of glory may come in.
 (Psalm 24:3-4, 7)

For the New Testament writers, the preparation and the blessing came through Christ. But the need to lift up the mind and thereby be transformed and renewed in faith was emphasized:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.... Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2)

For Paul too the mind's renewal came not simply through Christ but by the right use of what is good within the world:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
 (Phil. 4:8)

Paul believed that by God's grace such thoughts will lead the eyes and ears of the mind to the same hope that the thought of voice and verse inspired Milton to envision in his closing line:

To live with him, and sing in endless morn of light.
 This is the fulfillment of that other "happy morn" whose coming Milton had celebrated in the Nativity Ode.

The three poems just discussed present in modest scope convictions which Milton appears to have considered vital to the life of faith. Time and chance and death are seen to be the problems man confronts. Christ is seen to be the one who makes possible a triumph over them. And active faith is

seen to be sustained by the renewal of the mind. The concept of harmony is used to explicate each of these convictions, but in each instance faith is the conviction that controls the use of the idea of harmony. There is remarkable mastery not only of poetic technique but of the medium of thought. To a realistic recognition of man's need there is brought a luminous faith in what has happened to bring man a compelling power by which to grow.

It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the importance of the idea of harmony in Milton's thought. For Milton, Christ was clearly the means by which a change could come about for man but the desired end of every change was re-established harmony. Harmony was the conception Milton utilized to convey the richness of that correspondence between God and man called love. This gave his Christian thoughts much amplitude. Sustaining faith became for him the use of "the appearance of the likeness" of this final harmony to govern human action in this world. The effect of this was to make a "philosophy of Christ" by which to discover the potential correspondence of the world with God and then through grace by faith to make one's life so far as possible an earthly likeness to this correspondence yet to come. The challenge to man as Milton saw it was to develop a Christian ethical philosophy of the correspondences between the human and the divine by which to order and give growing shape to life. In this he was more thoroughgoing than Erasmus but like him in believing that "true piety consists in following Christ"

in such a way as to give expression in one's life to a "philosophy of Christ" that has its⁷ kinship with the teaching of the ancient philosophers." This was in line with that singular Christian humanist employment of philosophy as a means for shaping action in this world. Milton was soon to give his attention to the challenge with which the world confronts such faith.

Arcades is of interest here insofar as it indicates the manner in which Milton expressed his conviction of the possible correspondence between heaven and earth. Arcades was, of course, only "part of an Entertainment," a masque in honour of the Countess Dowager of Derby. To understand the poem one must realize the nature of the masque. It was an extravaganza, in which everything was given a proportion larger than in life. As Warton said, the rest of the masque "was probably prose and machinery" (Todd, IV:2). Todd describes the "machinery" of another masque also presented before the Countess Dowager of Derby. It is a "Mask" by Marston, the manuscript copy of which contains elaborate notes. The peculiar restriction placed upon such works--that of conforming to the decorum of extravaganza--can readily be seen by a few quotations from these notes.

"When hir Ladishipp approached the parke corner
a full noise of cornetts winded....Then passed
the whole troupe to the house....At the approach
of the Countesses into the greate Chamber, the
hoboyes played vntill the roome was marshaled;
which once ordered, a travers slyded away,
presently a cloude was seene moue vp and downe
almost to the topp of the greate Chamber, vpon

⁷ McGiffert, History, II:387.

wch Cynthia was discovered ryding; hir habitt was blewe satten fairely imbrodered with starres and cloudes: who looking downe, and earnestly survaying the Ladies, spake....In the midst of this speech Ariadne rose from ye bottome of the roome, mounted vpon a cloude wch waved vup vntill it came neere Cynthia....The cloudes descend, whilst soft musique soundeth: Cynthia and Ariadne dismount from their clouds, and, pacing vp to the Ladies, Cynthia perceaving Aryadne wanting hir crowne of starrs, speaks....

"Suddenly vpon this songe the cornetts were winded, and the travers that was drawn before the Masquers sanke downe: The whole shewe presently appeereth, wch presented it selfe in this figure: The whole body of it seemed to be the syde of a steepely ascending woodd; on the topp of wch in a fayre oake satt a goulden eagle: vnder whose wings satt in eight seuerall thrones the eight Masquers wth visards like starres, their helmes like Mercury's wth the addition of fayre plumes of carnation and white; their antique doublets and other furniture sutable to those cullours; the place full of shields, lights, and pages all in blew satten robes imbrodered wth starres. The Masquers thus discovered, satt still vntil Ariadne pronounced this invocation....

"During this Songe the Masquers presented their sheelds, and tooke forth their Ladyes to daunce.

"After they hadd daunced many measures... the night being much spent; whilst the Masquers prepared themselves for their departing measure. Cynthia spake...."

After this a shepherd sings "a passionate ditty att my Lady's departure....So the Countess passed on vntil she came through the little park, where Niobe presented hir wth a cabinet; and so departed" (Todd, IV:6-9).

As Todd says, such masques were presented

not without prodigious expence in machinery and decoration; to which humour we certainly owe the entertainment of Arcades, and the inimitable mask of Comus (Todd, IV:9).

So Arcades was part of a gala of the days, and this accounts for its extravagant quality. Thus when Milton refers to the Countess in the opening Song as a "sudden blaze of

majesty.../Too divine to be mistook.../ A deity so unparalleled," the reader must remember that she was, in effect, being made a member of the evening's cast of Nymphs, Shepherds, Genii and Gods. She is really only

Sitting like a Goddess bright,
In the centre of her light. (18-19)

The character of the Genius, however, is given another dimension than this. The figure of the Genius was frequently employed in masques and was derived "from the Roman conception ...that a nature-divinity, called the genius of the place, was attached to every locality" (Hughes, Minor Poems 211). But Milton gives such a full and vivid description of the service rendered on the earth by the Genius and of his power to hear the celestial harmony that it may be supposed that Milton's conception of the Genius here influenced his conception of the Attendant Spirit in A Mask.

The Genius begins his speech by pointing out that the shepherds and Nymphs belong to the same woodland area to which he belongs, and serve the same

Mistress of yon princely shrine,
Whom with low reverence I adore as mine,
(35-36)

Having this relation to them all, the Genius proposes to render service and guide them to see what mere Fame cannot describe.

And with all helpful service will comply
To further this night's glad solemnity;
And lead ye where ye may more near behold
What shallow-searching Fame hath left untold;
(38-41)

He is, in other words, a power that can help them relate their lives to the vision of the heavenly harmony. As the poem develops, it becomes clear that he cannot give them this vision but can inspire them to believe that the reality of this heavenly harmony makes possible a higher kind of human song. For although he dwells with them, he himself does hear and see this harmony:

Which I full oft amidst these shades alone
Have sat to wonder at, and gaze upon:
(42-43)

He can both see this harmony and help them by his sight because he is the sustaining and renewing power of the woodland to which all of them have come. He has been given his place and power by God:

For know by lot from Jove I am the pow'r
Of this fair Wood, and live in Oak'n bow'r,
To nurse the Saplings tall, and curl the grove
With Ringlets quaint, and wanton windings wove.
(44-47)

His function is that of a protecting power over nature, to heal daily the harm done by evil influences.

And all my Plants I save from nightly ill,
Of noisome winds, and blasting vapours chill;
And from the Boughs brush off the evil dew,
And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue,
Or what the cross dire-looking Planet smites,
Or hurtful Worm with canker'd venom bites.
(48-53)

His function is also to renew daily the power of natural things to grow.

When Ev'ning gray doth rise, I fetch my round
Over the mount, and all this hallow'd ground,
.....
Number my ranks, and visit every sprout
With puissant words and murmurs made to bless.
54-55, 59-60)

He has, in other words, a power over them to keep them from what otherwise would be complete calamity.

To do this he himself must be empowered, as he says he is by "Jove." That he has a power unlike that of anything of earth is revealed by the fact that he can directly listen to the harmony of the Spheres made by the celestial Siren's, whose single notes on each of the spheres make up a harmony. This is how he spends his leisure time:

But else in deep of night, when drowsiness
Hath lockt up mortal sense, then listen I
To the celestial Sirens' harmony,
That sit upon the nine enfolded Spheres
And sing to those that hold the vital shears
And turn the Adamantine spindle round,
On which the fate of gods and men is wound.
(61-67)

It is important to see how directly Milton draws upon the vision of Er at the close of Plato's Republic. In Plato a "line of light" extends from heaven and forms "the chains of heaven let down from above:"

for this light is the belt of heaven, and holds together the circle of the universe.... From these ends is extended the spindle of Necessity, on which all the revolutions turn....The spindle turns on the knees of Necessity; and on the upper surface of each circle is a siren, who goes round with them, hymning a single tone or note. The eight together form one harmony; and round about, at equal intervals, there is another band, three in number, each sitting upon her throne: these are the Fates, daughters of Necessity.... (Bk. X, 617. Vol. I:874-875)

Milton, however, in drawing on Plato's myth does not feel obliged to remain dependent on it. In the Republic, the Fates hold no shears. Hesiod had earlier described the myth of the Fates, in which Atropos carried "the abhorred shears" and cut the thread of life at the time of death.

In Plato's myth the Fates join with the sirens in their song and occasionally assist in turning the spheres. Milton, however, makes the Fates more fateful. In Milton's conception they would be inexorable in their desire to break up any harmony in things below, unless the music of the sirens held them in check and so maintained an unsteady harmony in Nature.

Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie,
 To lull the daughters of Necessity,
 And keep unsteady Nature to her law,
(68-70)

Milton conceives of the Sirens as now having a special function to fulfill related to that of the Genius--to draw the world "after the heavenly tune" and so keep the Fates from making chaos complete.

And keep unsteady Nature to her law,
 And the low world in measur'd motion draw
 After the heavenly tune.... (70-72)

The entire speech of the Genius involves a reworking of Greek myth, Plato's philosophy and the "Elizabethan world picture" discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The influence of the "dire-looking Planet" over the earth is mitigated by the Genius' power, and the harmony of the Spheres is such that by it God does not permit the Stars altogether to break the harmonizing influence in the lowest sphere where earth is placed. Both the Sirens' harmony and the Genius' power are conceived to be influences of a heavenly grace. The harmony, though unheard on earth except by beings such as the Genius, nevertheless indirectly draws Nature into some measure of

harmony by checking the disorienting power whose effect originates from beyond anything earthly. The Genius has a more direct power to grace the life of Nature: for he is here. He is to all intents an attendant Spirit, and the conception of the service he renders to the things of earth conveys the meaning that Nature is pervaded with a sustaining and renewing power or numerous such powers provided by heaven, distinct from nature but vital to the continuance of its own natural powers. This is, in other words, a conception of heavenly grace regarded as necessarily extended into the whole realm of Nature since the Fall--necessarily because otherwise natural life could not go on at all.

Because of his impurity, man cannot hear the heavenly harmony: "which none can hear/ Of human mould with gross unpurged ear" (72-73). And yet there are those, like the "rural Queen", who already deserve to hear it and who are themselves of a nature to enkindle harmony.

And yet such music worthiest were to blaze
The peerless height of her immortal praise,
Whose lustre leads us, (74-76)

She is "most fit" to have a song sung to her composed of "inimitable sounds." It is fitting, in other words, to praise the good that human nature sometimes manifests:

...yet as we go,
Whate'er the skill of lesser gods can show,
I will assay, her worth to celebrate. (78-80)

He has a limited power--"the skill of lesser gods"-- but in his limited way he will produce a song for human ears. His first song is a song of human praise: "Such a rural Queen/

All Arcadia hath not seen" (94-95). His second song draws out the implications of the first. It is a song of guidance back from the imagined Arcadia to England's shores.

Nymphs and Shepherds dance no more
 By sandy Ladon's Lillied banks,
 On old Lycaeus or Cyllene hoar,
 Trip no more in twilight ranks,

 A better soil shall give ye thanks.
 (96-98, 100)

As the Genius of the woods, he extends an invitation to them to "Bring your Flocks, and live with us" (101). The implication is to take up residence again with the renewing powers on earth. To do this, he says, will give them a greater power than any imagined power they could have: "Here ye shall have greater grace," (104)- a power something like the power with which he blesses Nature in their midst. But the power he assures them will be theirs is "greater grace/ To serve the Lady of this place" (105). They are told they will thus be empowered, not in Arcadia, but on earth and that the power they will be given is the power to serve. Not only this but their service is not now to an imagined deity but simply to the human "Lady of this place."

This is praise tempered by a sense of the true proportions of man's life on earth, and by a Christian view of life. The Genius' closing song as much as says that what heaven expects of us and empowers us to do is not to glorify any of the members of mankind but to serve each other here, even as the Genius does his best to do.

The force of the poem is limited by the extravagance

inherent in the masque form, especially since the poem is only a portion of the entire masque. The poem does not engage the reader's attention in the same way that a poem complete within itself would do. The extravagant quality and the sense of fragmentariness give a somewhat superficial air to what is said. And yet what is said has importance in itself and serves to direct attention beyond the extravagance of the masque as entertainment to what Milton appears to have believed to be the truth of the originating idea of such masques--that the premised correspondence between heavenly and earthly beings is an important one and that not just imaginary existence but real existence is the place to prove for oneself that this is so.

Songs such as those the Genius sang in Arcades had no mere conventional significance for Milton. What he said of poetry in the Elegia Sexta he applied to song. There he had said of the bard that

Diis etenim sacer est vates, divumque sacerdos,
Spirat et occultum pectus et ora Iovem.

For truly, the bard is sacred to the gods
and is their priest. His hidden heart and
his lips alike breathe out Jove. (77-78)

Probably some time after writing Arcades, Milton "wed" his conception of poetry more explicitly to that of song in the elegy Ad Patrem, to his father, who was an amateur musician. Three important passages in this work show the manner in which Milton conceived of the mediating role of poetry and song in giving man a sense of his kinship with the heavenly harmony. As was quoted in another context earlier,

Milton writes to his father:

Nec tu vatis opus divinum despice carmen,
Quo nihil aethereos ortus, et semina caeli,
Nil magis humanam commendat origine mentem,
Sancta Prometheae retinens vestigia flammae.

Do not you look down on song divine, creation
of the bard, for naught graces more finely than
does song his heavenly source, his heavenly seed,
his mind mortal in origin, for song still keeps
holy traces of Prometheus's fire. (17-20)

At the risk of being wrong, I must say that neither the translation of line 19 given in the Columbia Edition as quoted above nor that of Hughes seems to me to give quite the intended sense of the line. It would appear to me to read:

Nothing renders more agreeable in a way becoming
human nature the origin of the mind....

The point is important, because the whole sense of the four lines is to limit strictly the power of divinely originating human song. It is only "vestigia", "traces" of the Promethean fire that human song preserves. And yet these traces preserved by song indicate the origin of the mind more agreeably than anything else does. The implication of line 19 is that song expresses a quality of human grace that is a real part of human nature. And the suggestion of the four lines together is that song is a medium of grace to man. Its power is real but limited, in much the same way that the Genius in Arcades confesses that his song for human ears is limited in power.

For Milton it is in another life that the direct contact with heavenly harmony will come, and when it does it will

come in such a way that we shall then sing songs in company with heaven itself.

Nos etiam, patrium tunc cum repetemus Olympum,
Aeternaeque morae stabunt immobilis aevi,
Ibimus auratis per caeli templa coronis,
Dulcia suaviloquo sociantes carmina plectro,
Astra quibus genimique poli convexa sonabunt.

When we return to our native Olympus and the everlasting ages of immutable eternity are established, we shall walk, crowned with gold, through the temples of the skies and with the harp's soft accompaniment we shall sing sweet songs to which the stars shall echo and the vault of heaven from pole to pole. (30-34)

But on earth, he goes on to say, men depend upon the "vates", the bardic poet, to tell them about the deities in song.

Finally, Milton defines what the character of song must be to have such worth for man.

Denique quid vocis modulamen inane iuvabit
Verborum sensusque vacans, numerique loquacis?

In brief, what pleasure will there be in music well attuned if it is empty of voice, empty of words and of their meanings, and of numbers that talk? (50-51)

For Milton, song takes on its value by the meaning men convey through its medium with the help of words. He is saying that it is by taking thought that men take such wings as they can through the power of song. It is man's mind along with his heart that must be moved by what is heard.

During his visit to Italy Milton heard the renowned Italian soloist, Leonora Baroni. He wrote three short poems of praise to her and the first of these gives great insight into his conception of the nature and power of song as a medium of divine grace.

Angelus unicuique suus (sic credite gentes)
 Obtigit aethereis ales ab ordinibus.
 Quid mirum? Leonora tibi si gloria major,
 Nam tua praesentem vox sonat ipsa Deum.
 Aut Deus, aut vaciu certe mens tertia coeli
 Per tua secreto guttura serpit agens;
 Serpit agens, facilisque docet mortalia corda
 Sensim immortalis assuescere posse sono.

(1-8)

An angel each man--such be your belief, ye peoples--
 has as his lot, a winged angel from the heavenly
 ranks. Wherein, then, is it strange, if you,
 Leonora, have greater glory, since your voice
 itself sounds forth a god, a very present god?
 God, or at least, the Third Intelligence of
 emptied heaven [i.e., the Third Intelligence,
 quitting heaven], makes its way unseen through
 your throat, aye, makes its way, and graciously
 teaches mortal hearts the power to grow accustomed
 insensibly to sounds immortal.

The thought of the poem is premised on the assertion that each person has an angel influencing his life. God, in other words, does not leave men alone on earth. This makes it believable, Milton says, that God himself or at least the Third Intelligence, one of the highest angelic powers, has come down and moves invisibly through her vocal organs. In keeping with the general belief in the structure of the heavens and earth, this is a poetic way of saying that God inspires her song. "Serpit agens; / Serpit agens," he repeats to stress his conviction that God or a heavenly power does "make its way" through the physical faculties of men. God's purpose in doing so, Milton says, is that thereby he "graciously teaches mortal hearts the power to grow accustomed insensibly to sounds immortal." Thus by divinely inspired acts like that of song God makes it possible for men to prepare now for a life to come, for participation in the eternal

harmony, of which song is a pledge and means to grow.

In this conception God is distinguished from the voice-- he moves through it as an influencing power. But in the two concluding lines Milton makes a concession to the Italian Neoplatonism, of which Rome would still have been a stronghold at that time. So far in the poem he has stated his own interpretation of the splendor of her voice. "Sic credite gentes," "so believe, ye peoples," he has urged concerning the presence of angels in the lives of men. But now he admits to mind an alternate interpretation, that of the Neoplatonists:

Quod si cuncta quidem Deus est, per cunctaque fusus,
In te una loquitur, caetera mutus habet.

But, if all things are God, and God is transfused
through all, yet it is in you alone that He speaks:
to all else that He possesses He vouchsafes no voice.
(9-10)

The thought is as extravagant as he probably believed the Neoplatonic conception to have been. The distinction between God and man here becomes lost, and with it, it would seem, any true concern for seriousness. For he says that even if God is all things, he speaks only through her.--This is a philosophical anomaly but generous praise. It is the lavish kind of praise that the Italians liked--the kind contained in the Testimonia that preface Milton's Latin poems.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A CLEARING: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

It is not necessary to draw Milton's early thoughts into a system to see that a clear far-ranging pattern does emerge. He began with all that youth is given to begin with--not only God but nature and natural beauty and attractiveness and human love. He was caught up by these, but in such a way that he wanted to find an order, an intent, inherent in them, something that made relationship with them a meaningful one. To find this order in the created world he sought the help of learning and was caught up by the grace inherent in the very art of ordering and by all that the ancient writers themselves had held so dear.

But there was much to mar the order that he sought. Death itself brought so many fresh beginnings to an end. And in all the ongoings that each fresh beginning of human life made possible much was corrupt in men's intentions, erroneous in their conclusions, deceived in their thoughts and sometimes even evil in their designs. Evil, in fact, sometimes appeared to have a deceitfully controlling power. Truth shone in aspiration more than thought, and virtue seemed more spoken of than lived. And loyalty to the created realm was not identical with loyalty to God in spite of the fact that both loyalties were strong attractive powers in a

man.

The first great question that confronted Milton was a Christian one. Given not only the compelling power of heaven but also the attractive force of nature, half purifying, half corrupting and distracting man, how does one move from a corrupt state to an incorrupt, from a condition of distractedness to that of the highest concentration of human powers on that which leads from disharmony to harmony, with no good left out? For Milton would not admit that the movement must be an ascetic one. Created nature and all its interests must be included in any redemption acceptable to Milton's mind. So the first critical issue his mind had to resolve was how to love inclusively under a single loyalty.

For Milton the resolution of that problem proved to be that the nature that understands Christ submits to him and that man, with all his natural endowments, must do so too. After that single loyalty was confirmed for him, Milton continued to value nature, love and human aspiration and all the learning that could grace the mind. The difference was that now all these were placed in the service of what Milton believed to be God's own high end for man--redemption, and an earthly life that would body forth not only God's pledge of promised grace but man's pledge of faith as well.

What Milton saw to be necessary was some kind of recovered harmony that would confirm man's sense of a divine power upholding and renewing everything.

Such was the goal that Milton had in mind for man. Now

every fair stimulus was to be drawn upon to inspire man toward that recovered harmony. The first aim became to "stir up the passions of the soul" and draw man's whole nature to God's high ends in such a way that nothing potentially good would be left out. Learning became the means by which Milton believed that man could give an ordering to a life dedicated to God's own high ends. This became for him especially a drawing together of Platonic aspirations and Christian ones, directed by a "happy-sighted" vision of final blessedness that would overtake everyone who lived a dedicated life.

After dedicating himself to these high ends, Milton went on to set forth clearly the problem confronting man in time, the means that have been given to overcome it in Christ the Maker and Re-Maker of man, and the life of faith by which man can seek those forms of likeness to the promised harmony that can be both an inspiration and a temporal goal. He had reached a place where he could see the way that he believed a man should go. Such understanding is itself a clearing in which one can pause.

However, Milton's understanding of man's situation did not encourage too long a pause. Since writing the Nativity Ode Milton had placed increasing emphasis on the distinction between God and man--a distinction that would have amounted to separation if man had not been "blest" with some sustaining influences from among the heavenly powers. Those works written while he was at Horton show Milton's continual

concern with the way in which man's indirect relationship to the heavenly harmony could remain effectual. As has been shown, he conceived that way itself to be indirect--the use of earthly good and human faculties to raise the mind to think on likenesses to God. Man shapes his life by a belief in heaven's sustaining and renewing influence and by the hope that the pledges of beginning "bliss" will be fulfilled for him in an eternal life. In such a view this life becomes a life of faith, of walking thoughtfully within creation to discover and help to bring about some correspondences with heaven that still are possible in broken ways for creatures of this earth. Such re-established correspondences do not destroy evil or chaotic influences but mitigate their power. --Or should do so: no one can know until they are tried out.

Milton realized that if true correspondence with heaven is our goal and if the pledges of promised harmony are effectual now, the life of faith needs to be tried out in the world of time. This means that it is not enough to see the problem with which time confronts man. It is not enough to see that Christ enables bliss to begin. It is not enough to sustain faith in his promise by quickening belief in a harmony to come. Faith, to be effective, must confront the challenge of the world--of faithlessness. True obedience, fidelity to God's love, a life of holiness must face its opposite. There arises the deep necessity to invite the heavenly harmony, in whatever form it has to take, into one's life and then to act upon the vision that has been clarified.

Until that is done the questions of Christian living are not confronted in their immediacy and with the sense of urgency the world obliges men to have toward Christian life. Milton did not draw back from this most difficult step. He was ready to affirm the power of the renewed correspondence between God and man over the ultimate distractions of the world. He did so in A Mask Presented At Ludlow Castle. This work presents the life of faith confronted by the challenge of faithlessness.

CHAPTER NINE

BOUNDED FAITH: A MASK PRESENTED AT LUDLOW-CASTLE

Lord Monboddo wrote that "the subject of the Comus is a fine Mythological Tale, marvellous enough...but at the same time human."¹ No later criticism has altered the accuracy of what he said. Milton's masque is childlike in its purity--the childlikeness of those who somehow have known innocence again. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that childlike thoughts are simple ones. Children are not so much simple as they are ingenuous. They have a wide-eyed wonder and believe in nearly everything. Their sight is as endlessly complex as the reality they see, and yet their understanding is uncomplicated, for they judge by the boldest patterns of reality. Their judgment is especially influenced by the simple truth of a person, themselves or anyone, confronted by shapes of good and evil that are larger and appear to be of another order than they themselves. These shapes of good and evil appear splendid and desirable and impending, although mostly out of reach right now. And yet the child knows that as he is growing up he too belongs somewhere nearby them. He cannot quite name them, perhaps, or quite come to friendly terms with them, and so they trouble him, good and evil both. They

¹The Poetical Works of John Milton with Notes of various Authors, ed. H. J. Todd (5th ed., 1852), IV:177.

are not altogether larger than the life he knows, these shapes that look so inviting or so threatening, and yet in his imagination he is inclined to make them so. To do so gives him a kind of mastery. Besides, he cannot help feeling that the good shapes will ward off the bad for him, so that everything will turn out all right and he himself will grow to have a place that counts at last.

It is such a childlike spirit that underlies the artifice of Milton's masque and that helps the reader see the force of what the masque presents: the simple truth of the capacity of a faithful person to ward off evil, and the power heaven sends to support him in his effort and, ultimately, to wrest him from his adversary.² Given the assumptions of good human character, heavenly reality and objective evil, what could be simpler and less complex or more fraught with wonder, yet expressed through such elaborate and delightful artifice? Comus is preposterous, a fantastic phantasy, like nothing we quite know, and yet his elegant gaiety in evil-doing, his evident mirth and sensitiveness while engaged in the most abominable acts,

²The usual character of a masque of the period was dealt with in the discussion of Arcades. The present masque contains important differences, however, and Hanford's summary of these is helpful at this point: "Milton minimizes the element of pageantry and dance; he substitutes an outdoor scene for the ordinary setting of the banquet hall; he expands the dialogue portion of the piece far beyond its usual limits and injects into it an earnestness of meaning quite foreign to the tradition." Handbook, 158-159.

at once pleases and troubles us, as though dimly we are conscious of having known something of such an influence--yesterday perhaps--and of having liked it and yet, strangely enough, abhorred it too. The Lady has somehow stumbled into Comus' world, and while she does not properly belong there, she believes that she can cope with what she meets or, if necessary, that the help she needs will surely come. She is not less capable in this strange place than Alice-in-Wonderland; only more startled because the figure she confronts is a more startling one.

The childlike reader of such a work knows without being told that he is in the land of folklore, romance and religious myth.³ The figures of Comus and the Attendant Spirit are not quite like our life, but they are like those shapes we always felt loomed next to us. And the Lady goes into that shape-filled world of entities that hover on the edges of the mind. She does so in a way that we perhaps have done

³It does not seem necessary to evaluate the literary sources in the present work. They do, however, provide an important background for the reading of the poem, not only because of their influence on Milton but on the reader of his poem as well. Todd and Hawkins both give useful material on the sources, including excellent annotations. Arthos gives a brief and pointed summary. It seems well established that the masque's quality of folklore, with its conception of a threat to innocence, derives from George Peele's The Old Wives Tale and that the quality of romantic pastoral, with its ideal world of love, owes much to Giles Fletcher's The Faithful Shepherdess. Spenser's The Faerie Queene and Shepherd's Calender appear to me to have influenced not only the language and style but the tone. Homer's Circe myth, along with Plato's myth of Er, are chief sources of the mythology. And I would think that the magical quality and even the rational delimitation of the magical in Milton's work owe a great deal to Shakespeare's handling of these elements in The Tempest.

or wanted to--not as oneself but as that truth of character into which the imagination knows it must transform a person if he is to enter such a realm of beings at all. The child-like reader's imagination knows that this is so, and his mind identifies the desired truth of his own being with the truth of what is going on. It is the characters' likeness to the truth and falsehood of that larger-than-life existence that we sometimes know that forces us to take them seriously, because they present what we on the growing edges of our life have always known to be imminent. What we are shown is the truth of life that we dimly sense our own lives somehow ought to have.⁴

The present interpretation of A Mask will follow the sequence of thought as this develops in the poem. Otherwise it proves too easy to lose the emphases of thought the poem itself gives and to overstress one source or expressed con-

⁴Arthos' comment on the elements of romanticism in the masque agrees with this: "As with all romanticism its force lies in the paradox that perfection is within the grasp of feeling" (On A Mask, 22). What we are called upon to grasp is the individual's relation to his universe, "man in his cosmic setting...attuned in his own microcosm to all the great happenings of the enveloping universe" (Tillyard, Studies, 88). It is absolutely fundamental for the reading of the poem to see this fact. For it is this which enables the reader "to draw forth the argument, to render its implications more precise and specific than he finds them, and in so doing...be guided by the suggestions which the poet has been able to give, here by an image, there by an overtone" (Woodhouse, "Argument", 47).

viction at the expense of others. In discussing a poem as rich as this one is, no one should presume to be definitive. What I have sought to do is to become one of those "who in later times begin to interpret the masque for themselves."⁵ In doing so I have been conscious that it stands in a relationship with Milton's other early works.

"The first Scene discovers a wild Wood," into which "the attendant Spirit descends." A sense of brooding darkness penetrated by a being from the realm of light is what first commands the audience's attention. He comes not as the shepherd Thyrsis but himself. He describes immediately the home, the "mansion," from which he has come:

Before the starry threshold of Jove's Court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aerial Spirits live inspher'd
In Regions mild of calm and serene Air, (1-4)

Any listener of the times would have known this shape. It is that of the angels who dwell and minister among the spheres. They are created beings, like the spheres themselves. They live before the threshold, for they were given being in order that they might minister. Regardless of the errands they may perform below, their existence rightly belongs to the pure realm of created being above the lowest sphere in which the condition of sublunary decrepitude exists. The poem does not demand a reference to aerial demons at this point. Milton changed his mind about this (as indeed he altered the content of the opening speech and portions of

⁵Arthos, On "A Mask", 1.

the poem as a whole). The passage is explicable on the basis of popular conceptions of the created spheres, precisely where the passage leads the listener's thought.

For it is Jove's court that stands above the threshold and the Spirits' home, and it is Jove who has given being and direction to all below. A threshold is the sill or entrance of a door, and one may be permitted to think of Jesus as himself the threshold over which his sheep will step in going in through the one door they know they are to enter past the stars. The allusion is no more than a suggestion given to the mind, and yet it is of the same nature as the allusion in the poem's final line. John 10:1-18 is, I think, not without significance in this pastoral poem, for Comus is himself a "thief and robber," who in his final effects "comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

The contrast of the pure created realm above with "this dim spot,/ Which men call Earth," (5-6) is sharply made in terms of purity and impurity of nature and clarity and obscurity of sight: "Regions mild of calm and serene Air,/ Above the smoke and stir" (4-5). Likewise, and with the utmost significance, man's condition and the inexcusable reason for it is precisely put. Men are "Confin'd and pester'd in this pin-fold here," (7). The tone is one of disdain, as though they no longer need to be confined like animals. Their condition is such that they "Strive to keep up a frail and Feverish being," (8). The implication of this

line is that they are unreasonably straining to keep up a separate existence, as though the created order and the help it offers doesn't count. The trouble with such men is the nature of their care. It is "low-thoughted care." They are turned away from all the order and its source above. They are thinking low, not thinking high at all. They are emphatically "unmindful," and the attendant Spirit knows that men no longer have excuse to live this way. For "low-thoughted care" and unmindfulness are the opposite of what men have been told to pay attention to:

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.
(Matthew 6:31-33)

The Spirit's disdain is expressed toward those who do not recognize that a power has been given by which men can raise their eyes. But he says he comes to help those who have heard. Of course, this Spirit is different than the Holy Spirit of God; he is one of those ministering spirits through which the grace of God himself may work now on behalf of those who have listened to his Son.

Some have listened, and there is a "crown that Virtue gives/ After this mortal change" (9-10). But the Spirit agrees with Paul that the crown comes after "the mortal puts on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:54). It is given by Virtue to her "true Servants" who, in the eternal life to come are

"Amongst the enthron'd gods on Sainted seats" (11).⁶ They are the saints in the life to come who here below

...by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that Golden Key
That opes the Palace of Eternity: (12-14)

The key is the knowledge of the justice and the love of God and of the new ordering His Son has made possible:

"But woe to you Pharisees! for you...neglect justice and the love of God.... Woe to you lawyers! for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering." (Luke 11:42, 52)

The key is finally gained by taking "due steps," of which the walk through some dark woods by faith may well be one. There is some point to a comment on this passage made by Brooks and Hardy: "The implication is that one 'aspires' to be crowned, or to be admitted to eternity among the blessed, principally by being steadfastly, patiently mindful of the prospective change, which will actually occur as something preordained, not as the result of the aspiration" (190). Mindfulness is the controlling conception of the passage itself. It does not suggest that anything is "preordained;" it suggests that faith does not exist except where men continually seek fresh knowledge of God's justice and his love. Virtue gives the crown because it is a life shaped by such knowledge that proves saintliness.

This notion that faith is mindfulness of the justice

⁶In view of the explicit emphasis given to virtue at the beginning and ending of the masque, it is remarkable that we seem to have needed J. C. Maxwell's reminder that "throughout the poem, Virtue is the main theme" (380). It must be remembered, however, that chastity is a positive virtue.

and love of God is a strongly Protestant one. It all but controlled the thinking of the Reformed tradition of Protestantism. It encouraged the great Protestant stress on the distinction between God and man and led to an ethical rather than a pietistic interpretation of the Christian life. Milton's poem shows evidence that he was affected by such conceptions here. There was, however, a marked distinction between the treatment of these matters by Zwingli, Melancthon and Calvin. It is Zwingli whose view is closest to Milton's conception of mindfulness, as McGiffert's comments on Zwingli help to show: according to Zwingli, revelation "is not a means of grace in Luther's sense, but a guide for Christian faith and life." As a consequence of this view of revelation, faith assumes a special character:

Faith is not only trust in God's forgiving love in Christ, but also the acceptance of His truth and confidence in His providential love revealed in all his works. Much is made of the goodness of God which controls all His activities, and manifests itself, not simply in the salvation of sinners, but in the entire government of the world. Heathen have believed in God as well as Christians, though they have known nothing about Christ, and the faith which the Christian has in God is of the same general nature, though more intelligent and better grounded.⁷

The passage does much to suggest the nature of the Christian conceptions that were controlling Milton's view. In addition, one of the dominating features of the Reformed tradition during its early centuries of development was the belief that the ones who really matter are the faithful ones.

⁷ McGiffert, Protestant Thought, 65-66.

However, Milton's expression of this belief has a somewhat different force. The attendant Spirit says:

To such my errand is, and but for such,
I would not soil these pure Ambrosial weeds
With the rank vapours of this Sin-worn mould.
(15-17)

The Spirit's disdain for those who continue to allow themselves to be controlled by sin is there. But it must be remembered too that he is a spirit of limited powers. He has come as a help to those who lead committed lives. It is a sustaining, not a converting, form of grace that he assists. The suggestion is already given that the poem premises the fact of prior dedication and training before the trial of faith and virtue are to take place.

Again, it must be recognized that up to this point at least the poem draws on the listeners' popular conception of the order and nature of the created spheres. What is stressed is the distinctiveness of celestial and "Sin-worn" realms, the kind of life in each and the reliance of the lower on the higher for support. Boundaries begin to be set at once for everything, and the suggestion is given that the order, whether good or bad, is of a limiting kind. Finally, the Christian note of sin and saintliness is struck in such a way that the aspiration to live mindfully so that these attractive realms may someday be one's home controls the thought. The attendant Spirit's opening lines are an affirmation of what faith may do for men. As Arthos has well said, "the vistas of heaven guide the poem" (On "A Mask", 18).

There is a sense of distances, and with it a sense of longing and of need. Mindfulness is indicated as the method to preserve the vistas' power.

But we are shown more than vistas: from the beginning of the poem we are shown presences--not Jove, but heralds and helpers of Jove's own intent--powers that have abilities and influences of their own. There was nothing esoteric about this for Milton's listeners, and we who read the poem today should do so with an understanding of what Douglas Bush expressed: "The modern reader who would understand seventeenth century literature must shake off his habit of believing only what he sees and must try to realize a world in which man's every thought and act are of vital concern to God and to his own eternal state, a world interpenetrated by spiritual potencies" (Literature, 36-37). As Bush has noted, such a view was made compatible with the toughest realism, because Milton and his listeners knew that there are woods where men do lose their way and intruders much like Comus come. Part of this realism was the belief that limitations have been set for everything, limitations which serve not so much to restrict as to delimit the character and define the power of all created life.

The sense of boundaries and limitations and proportions to the government of things is amplified in the next section of the Spirit's opening speech. Neptune, by agreement with Jove, rules the sea and "all the Sea-girt Isles." He in turn has parceled out their government, "to grace his trib-

utary gods." He has given the rule of England, "The greatest and the best of all the main," to "his blue-hair'd deities." But even there government is given boundaries, and it is a portion of Wales that "A noble Peer of mickle trust and power/ Has in his charge" (31-32). This human governor guides "with temper'd awe." Here too there is a sense of reverence, of recognition that his duties as a guide and governor have been bestowed on him by a divine power. Not just the sense of heaven but the sense of grace is everywhere.

The off-spring of this "noble Peer" have been "nurs't in Princely lore." Although they may be untried, they have been trained since childhood in the art of government. Again, it is to those who have been prepared that the poem applies. But I think it is a mistake to think of this too narrowly. For everyone believed that it is man who has been given "dominion over the works" of God's hands. Young men, and women too apparently, were made for governing, and the poem's interest is directed to that kind of governing with which everyone must be concerned--the government of oneself, with some degree of help.

The off-spring are coming to attend a father's power. But, ironically, they cannot share the benefits of his power until they make their way through "the perplex't paths of this drear Wood." Their way "lies" through those paths: it is not precisely chance that takes them there, although it is something like chance that causes them to separate. It seems that there is some design in requiring

them to walk through that "drear Wood," and it is a mere recollection of the mind that brings to remembrance one of Jesus' prayers:

I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.... As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth. (John 17:15, 18-19)

In the context, to "keep them from the evil one" must mean to keep them from being subdued by him. Like everyone else, Christians must walk through and not around the world. That is what it means to aspire "by due steps." On earth at least, the off-spring must walk through the "perplext paths" to reach the seat of governance, as though a person is not able to give true attendance upon human powers of governing until he is able to walk securely through some woods himself.

There is something ominous about the Wood itself. It is a strange Wood whose horror "Threats the forlorn and wand'ring Passenger" (39). The wood is not only "perplext": it is a wood of "nodding" horror and "shady" brows. It is the kind of wood that lulls the weary into indolence or sleep and that would encourage the imagination to magnify the dream-like quality of indolence. The kind of wood, in other words, that itself tempts the will to weaken and the thoughts to stray. If such an influence is unintentional it is no less real, even as that of any woodland can prove to be on dark and sultry days. "Soveran Jove" knows this and quickly "dispatcht" the attendant Spirit "for their defence, and guard." The attendant Spirit is shown quite

clearly here to be a guarding, not a governing, kind of power. It is also clear that Jove has eyes for those who walk through such woods and readiness to send help. It should be noted too that it is "their tender age" that "might suffer peril"--the threat of peril applies to every such "Passenger" and therefore to the brothers as well as to their sister in the wood.

The attendant Spirit then explains the special reason why he needs to come. And he does indeed tell "What never yet was heard in Tale or Song/ From old or modern Bard, in Hall or Bow'r" (44-45). For after all the sources have been sifted, Comus stands as a figure Milton conjures for the first time in such a form in the history of literature.⁸ Milton is his own best commentator here. Comus is the son of Bacchus and Circe. Bacchus is he who first "Crusht the sweet poison of mis-used Wine," (47). The misuse appears to cause the poisoning. Circe is she

...Whose charmed Cup
Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape,
And downward fell into a groveling Swine.)
(51-53)

Circe is a "Nymph," one of the inferior divinities of nature, and Bacchus is a defective god of "blithe youth." Comus is "Much like his Father but his Mother more," (57). His forte is that he "Excels his Mother at her mighty Art," (63). It is to the "weary Traveller," those of low spirits and in need of physical replenishment that he offers "His

⁸ See Todd's annotations, ll. 44-75. Cf. Arthos' comparison of Comus and Circe, On "A Mask", 5-8 and notes.

orient liquor in a Crystal Glass," (65). He offers them a cocktail, in other words, in an uncongenial place. And "most do taste" because their thirst has made them foolishly intemperate. The Spirit's description of what happens to them is a vivid one, presented in a tone of fierce disdain. For it is their "express resemblance of the gods" that is defaced. The effect is frightening. They are proud of their disfigurement, lose all sense of "friends and native home" and are delighted "To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty" (77). Such is the effect that Comus has on men--to deceive them into exchanging their likeness to the gods for that of animals, forgetting God himself and all that friends and home may mean, in order to revel in a life of sensuality. The meaning, if not the pleasure, has gone out of life for them.

The description has the character of folklore and its truth. The picture is not that of original sin but of the "lapsed soul" committing disobedience. The nature of that disobedience is sensual forgetfulness.

The attendant Spirit then reiterates for the third time that he is sent down from above to aid those whom God desires to help in such a wood that has within it such an enemy. There must be a purpose in such repetition, and it seems to me that the purpose is to make the contrast between the higher and lower spheres unmistakable and to make the human need for help and the watchful willingness of God to send help clear beyond doubt. What happens is that the awareness of man's need for a descent of some form of divine

aid from the celestial regions to the earth is given an unforgettable, all but incantatory, power. The willingness of God to help and of his emissaries to descend to earth is set forth at the beginning of the poem, and the ability of men to prepare for an ascent to come is reiterated at the poem's close. Such a carefully conceived design, together with the poem's final reminder of heaven's willingness to stoop, seem to me to enfold the entire action of the poem in the context of God's grace and man's answering faith. The context appears to me to be as vivid as that of folklore, which I would say that it was meant to be. However much they may become refined as the action of the poem proceeds, the basic distinctions and motivations and issues are hardly subtle ones. They cannot be if the poem is to succeed. For its function is other than to set us arguing.

This is also the third time that mention is made of the fact that some are "favour'd of high Jove." It should be remembered that there was a time in Christianity when not everyone's eternal future was considered settled beyond all reasonable doubt. In fact, Milton's conception was the all but universal one--that only those who remain faithful, who persevere to the end, are "blest" eternally. The parable of the maidens "who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom" comes to mind to illustrate the prevailing view in connection with this poem. The wise maidens had their lamps prepared when the bridegroom came at midnight. The foolish ones had to run in search of oil for their lamps.

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." (Matt. 25:10-13)

For those of Milton's listeners who read this seriously, his poem would have had a special kind of power.

The region in which Comus and his crew are found is called "this advent'rous glade," as though men are bound to seek adventures there. To it the attendant Spirit can come instantaneously, "Swift as the Sparkle of a glancing Star," (80). According to Todd's note, both the Angel Michael in Tasso and the "singing angels" in Fletcher are described as coming in this way. When the attendant Spirit says that "I shoot from Heav'n to give him safe convoy," (82) he all but confirms that he is an angelic power. It is his descent, however, that is emphasized. On earth he must put off "These my sky robes spun out of Iris' Woof,/ And take the Weeds and likeness of a Swain," (82-83). Perhaps nothing is more amazing in the poem than this, that the help Heaven sends should take a human form. I take it that there is the most trenchant kind of meaning intended here. For with all the references to heaven and celestial realms, to starry thresholds and God's readiness to help, the help comes in the likeness of a man. Even the reader who knows that this happened far more decisively once before in Christian history may not be entirely prepared for this--that some instant need for Heaven's help should still be given in some human

form. Perhaps this is as close as one can come in poetry to saying that grace itself on earth must take the form of faith. For that is what the attendant Spirit does. He takes on the likeness of one who has himself already served the house and stilled the winds and hushed "the waving Woods" with harmony. The form of one "nor less of faith," the "likeliest, and nearest to the present aid" (90). It is as the faithful shepherd, the country Swain, "in this office of his Mountain watch" (89), that the Spirit comes. It is hard to believe that there is not still another likeness alluded to by that--by no means that the Spirit is the same as Christ but that upon his descent he acts in a human likeness just as Christ in his coming chose to do. There is at least no question that the Spirit takes on the limiting likeness of the one who is the likeliest to give the necessary aid in human form. The point that Miss Tuve makes is no small one: "Thyrsis is a Shepherd. He came down to be one, and his disguise is his meaning" (128).

If the attendant Spirit has succeeded in his role up to this point, the reader is prepared to understand the "hateful steps" that come. The stage directions leave no doubt as to what the entering company is like. At the head is Comus with his Charming Rod and Glass. Around him is "a rout of Monsters...their Apparel glistening." They enter with torches, making a chaotic noise. At least it is not a scene by which any listeners would be likely to be taken in. Comus, however, might well take in the world. For everything good appears to him to be relaxation and gaiety. He

colors everything to his advantage, even more than mortals are inclined to do. He knows all about the order that things have and that night is his best chance to bring disorder in.

Rigour now is gone to bed,
And Advice with scrupulous head, (107-108)

Especially these, for they are his worst enemy, the will and the mind that will not bend to him. His bold abuse of truth is dazzling:

We that are of purer fire
Imitate the Starry Quire,
Who in their nightly watchful Spheres,
Lead in swift round the Months and Years.
(111-114)

It is interesting to find a source for this popular conception in Ecclesiasticus, as Todd notes: "The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven, a gleaming array in the heights of the Lord. At the command of the Holy One they stand as ordered, they never relax in their watches." (43:9-10). Whoever he may be deceiving at the moment, Comus himself knows the value of the night for him.

Come let us our rites begin,
'Tis only day-light that makes Sin,
Which these dun shades will ne'er report.
(125-127)

His kind of evil "flourishes in the dark" (Arthos, On "A Mask", 29).

Comus, however, does something that must not go unnoticed in the poem. For whatever his own being may be, he worships too--Cotyto, the goddess of the obscene. And while he likes to call her "Goddess of Nocturnal sport," he knows that she is worshipped not by sacred but by

"secret flame." No one calls this goddess, he well knows, except "when the Dragon womb/ Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom," (131-132). She is not made to seem the happiest kind of helper one could have, and yet it is to her he prays:

...befriend
Us thy vow'd Priests, till utmost end
Of all thy dues be done... (135-136)

Her worship is "conceal'd Solemnity," and he and all his crew are priests of hers.

Come, knit hands, and beat the ground,
In a light fantastic round. (143-144)

These are some of the other pleasures of the leisure hours--the imbruting ones. The picture could hardly be more fascinating or more troubling.

It is into this scene that the Lady almost comes. Not quite, however, because the reality of what they do must be hid from her, and they themselves hidden or changed into a form that may beguile. Comus has the power to know the Lady's nature just by the different rhythm of her feet. It is a "chaste footing" and she herself, as he has Art to know, "some Virgin sure," the opposite of all his company. His first thought is that with enough like her he will soon have "a herd."

It is now that magic begins to come into its own in the structure of the poem.

...Thus I hurl
My dazzling Spells into the spongy air,
Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion,
And give it false presentments, (153-156)

It is necessary to point out, I think, that these are

"presentments" over which the mind and will of those who see them have no control. They are evidences, however magical, presented to the sight. It is in the realm of the senses that magic here is given its power. Comus can alter true appearances to deceive the senses, but to win her he must use other means. He must use cunning, not magic, to win the mind and will and soul.

I under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well plac't words of glozing courtesy,
Baited with reasons not unplaussible,
Wind me into the easy-hearted man,
And hug him into snares. (160-164)

He must be a deceitful and misguiding friend, who by false friendship, false honour, false reasons and false feelings blinds another to walk off the structured bridge of life with him. To do this he too, like the attendant Spirit, takes on the likeness of a human form. He too must strangely limit his own weird form of "grace," and as a consequence the action of the poem will take place in that quasi-human realm about which the childlike imagination has long had hints of knowledge of its own.

The Lady as she enters is quite lost, and her senses are her best immediate guide. For it is a physical kind of lostness, a lostness of the senses, that has overtaken her. Her judgment of the sounds she hears is accurate.

...methought it was the sound
Of Riot and ill manag'd Merriment, (171-172)

She knows too that these are the sounds of those who "thank the gods amiss." But her understanding is limited to the human significance of these, for even into such woods it is

a human self she brings. She is

...loath
To meet the rudeness and swill'd insolence
Of such late Wassailers; (177-179)

But necessity obliges her to turn to them. For she is unacquainted with "the blind mazes of this tangl'd Wood," and implicitly her brothers, who left her on her own, are unacquainted with it too. She is also "wearied out/ With this long way," as was said to happen to "Passengers" in such a wood. It is physical refreshment that her brothers have gone to seek for her, and it is the sensuous need she shares with all of this wood's wanderers that gives Comus the sensual opening he desires. Those who walk through here are "Travailleurs." ⁹

Her immediate trouble is that she is cut off from nature's light, for she invests that light with the holiness her own mind can give. Evening itself is looked upon by her as "the gray-hooded Ev'n/ Like a sad Votarist in Palmer's weed" (188-189). But this darkness is even darker than the ordinary night. It is "envious darkness" and "thievish Night" that

...for some felonious end,
In thy dark lantern thus close up the Stars,
That nature hung in Heav'n, and fill'd their Lamps
With everlasting oil, to give due light
To the misled and lonely Travailer? (196-200)

⁹ Milton's MS. (Trinity), and the 1637 and 1645 eds. have Travailer. The 1673 ed. (and CE) have Traveller, as does Hughes. Cf. CE I, part ii, p. 499, n. 199. Line numbers used follow 1645 ed. and Hughes. The 1673 ed. and CE delete l. 167 and transpose ll. 168 and 169 (167 and 168 in CE).

There are not two realms, a realm of nature and a realm of grace for her. Nature is to her not only innocent but holy in its intent, and one cannot help remarking that it is the parable of the maidens with filled lamps that comes to her mind when she thinks of nature's Stars at night. Nature, in her mind anyway, is not only present but prepared to help. For nature to her has been graced with re-established order too--even the Stars are no longer fateful powers but gracious ones. And I think she helps the reader understand that Comus, although he has some influence over nature like that of a kind of black divinity, cannot be thought of as a nature-god. Even in the natural order Comus is a felon and a thief. It is Cotytto whom he serves and for her ends and his own that he tries to steal the senses and turn them into some lecherous form of sensuality. One is reminded of the Seventh Prolusion, where "Ignorance must be something yet worse, yet more vile, yet more wretched, in a word the very depth of degradation," where even the animals would not choose to follow.

But the Lady does not know this Comus yet. She only knows a night more dark than any night she has confronted up to now:

Yet nought but single darkness do I find.
What might this be? (204-205)

It is at this point that the first real sense of threat comes over her. At her first consciousness of total darkness:

A thousand fantasies
 Begin to throng into my memory
 Of calling shapes, and beck'ning shadows dire,
 (205-207)

These are fantasies in their worst form, that call and beck-on and "syllable men's names." But these are of the mind; they may pass through but cannot control her thought. She has the power to thrust off panic. She has the resources of faith and holiness--for it is holy images that present themselves to her. Her "virtuous mind," in her own understanding anyway, never walks alone. It

...ever walks attended
 By a strong siding champion Conscience.
 (211-212)

These are human faculties which make her feel secure within herself because she relates them to her God by the means she knows his own grace has made possible: by looking at the forms of truth that have been given to the holy mind to know. Faith, Hope and Chastity--these are Christian virtues of the mind, present only when God by his grace has made them so. There is an inseparable relation here between what God gives the mind and what he is; and yet there is complete distinction between what he gives to man on earth and what he in his own being is. The Lady welcomes these great gifts and knows that in their own way they have Angel's wings, just as the Stars can fill their Lamps "With everlasting oil." She sees them visibly because they are present in her mind; but it is not necessary to conclude that there is mysticism in her thought of them. Those who think otherwise in my judgment have not explored with

sufficient seriousness the implications for this poem of the fact that Milton was a Protestant in his faith and not necessarily a Platonist first of all. The evidence in the poem indicates that Milton was affirming in this passage the full Christian sense in which faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."¹⁰

¹⁰KJV reading. RSV, with equal point, gives: "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Augustine makes the vital distinction in Bk. XXII, ch. 29 of The City of God. He suggests that the temporary "power of seeing things incorporeal" may have been granted to such as Job, but interprets this in a more ordinary way for other Christians, as Paul did in Ephesians 1:18--"Having the eyes of your heart illuminated." (See Basic Writings, II:658). This is what I suppose to have been happening to the Lady here. She was seeing a likeness of perfection with the eyes of faith. She can see the ideas but these are graces given to the mind. There is no need to suppose that she can see into heaven's nature except in the form that heaven's grace brings to her in ways her human comprehension can take in.

I would think, then, that these virtues are not just Platonic ideas. They are the virtues that Christian grace, God's grace, gives to the mind. By faith they are seen visibly. The mystery is not here that of magic or even mysticism but of grace that can inspire to holiness the person whose being remains distinct from God and whose sight is creaturely not heavenly at all. That is why the attendant Spirit and Comus must take human form. For they want not just to influence invisibly but to be known visibly to the mind. Faith, Hope and Chastity come in a kind of human likeness too--the likeness of the mind, the likeness of the Lady's thoughts, visible and powerful in her mind because they are graced thoughts, the thoughts God gives her now. Part of what confirms this interpretation for me is the fact that the Lady's thoughts are so full of images of holiness that derive from Christian sources and the fact that the virtues she calls upon are Christian ones. But in contrast to this view see Arthos, "Milton, Picino and the Charmides." He has come to believe that in this poem Milton makes chastity a translation of Plato's sophrosyne, which in its original derivation, Arthos says, "signifies soundness or health of mind" (264). Arthos' view is that Milton "would be proposing the word as a synonym in an effort to recapitulate and extend the argument of Plato's dialogue" (264). Arthos' views warrant close attention, and in this study I have tried to give them that.

The Lady's virtue, like her vision, is as strong and limited as faith itself. Here these virtues of the mind are the self's own, given to abide within the self, so that the self can itself direct the whole of life to God. It is the truth of her own faith, her own hope, her own fidelity in love that she sees, and that is why this love, in her eyes, takes the form of chastity. It is the form of love which her innocent and virginal nature can give to God. Paul, in 1 Corinthians, says that "now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." But even so, for Paul it is now that "faith, hope, love abide, these three." And it is in the now of the poem that these three abide for the Lady, gifts, but her own now, by which to direct her life in holiness. They are not coming to her by some sudden descent; they belong in her being because of her belief, presumably in what a Lord has done, and they are returning to her consciousness to thwart the sudden panic she has felt. So they are virtues that are neither "God-infused" nor natural. They are graces of the mind that faith makes real. For the world since Christ has come is one of grace for those who believe that life is governed now by a renewing power. And the Lady in this poem lives and meets every eventuality by just this faith. Chastity is here the innocence of love for God, the kind which the young in faith know best. To be mindful of God when young is to be chaste.

Creation is a realm of grace for her. She knows by the strength of her own faith that the renewing power of all things will give aid to her. For the power of grace, God's own power, is for her no less than it was for Paul at work in all things now.¹¹

¹¹This seems to me to be the vital point upon which the understanding of the masque depends. A. E. Dyson has expressed this very clearly at the beginning and close of an interpretation which makes curiously little use of an insight which he too calls "central to the interpretation of *Comus*." I am in complete agreement with his analysis and simplification of Woodhouse's view. "The Lady belongs to the world of Grace...." (See pp. 89 & 114 of Dyson's essay. Cf. Brett, pp. 23-41. For a different view, see R. M. Adams, *Ikon*, ch. 1). Part of this had already been noted by Bush and others before, as applying not specifically to this poem but to the Christian outlook on the individual and the world in Milton's day: "Both the right reason of the individual and the saving remnant of the regenerate are, like the created universe, worlds of divine order in the midst of chaos" (*English Literature*, 376). "In the use of Reason and the exercise of virtue we enjoy God," was the way that Whichcote put it. (Quoted in Cragg, 47. Cragg gives a very sympathetic interpretation of the Cambridge Platonists, making their views more lucid than the original writers often did).

Those who have perhaps given the closest attention to the poem in an effort to find an alternate interpretation to the present one and yet who are conscious of the need to recognize in the poem some principle of ordering unity are Woodhouse and Arthos. Dyson's critique of Woodhouse's "Argument" would be my own: the tone and movement of the poem both depend upon and foster a point of view in which the perspective on the world is unified, in contrast to *Comus*' alarmingly disuniting one. Arthos, in agreeing with Woodhouse that the poem has an "argument," believes in contrast to Woodhouse that the argument is explicable in terms of Platonism and that there is "no detail in the thought that requires a special theological interpretation, and in particular no reference to an idea of grace to be explained only by seventeenth-century theology." And yet his interpretation does not prove altogether "self-consistent" in Platonic terms alone, a fact which his more recent additions to his interpretation serve to emphasize by making philosophical considerations overshadow the many other sources that contribute so splendidly to the atmosphere and movement of the poem. Preoccupation with philosophy seems

to me to make him interpret the poem in terms that are too absolute and that do not quite conform to its movement of action or meaning. To make the poem's thought parallel that of Plato's Charmides and Ficino's interpretation of sophrosyne, Arthos has to say that Chastity and contemplation are "one and the same" in the poem, that "the declaration of the chaste mind and will has the power to transform the outside, threatening world," and that "whoever is perfect in this virtue is protected from all evil; but more than that, he is escaping death" ("Milton, Ficino and the Charmides," 262-263). In contrast to the need for the poem to say these things if it really conformed to Platonism first of all, it seems to me that the poem does not precisely say any of these things. In the poem contemplation is called "Wisdom's" "best nurse," not the virtue of chastity but the mind's nourisher--chastity in the poem is much more than this. Also, in the poem the Lady's "sacred vehemence" (which she does not employ, and I think does not because she trusts so utterly the power that graces her own mind and life) is not clearly said by her to have a power in itself sufficient "to transform the world." One is reminded of what Moses did at Meribah ("Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?") and of how God viewed his action when he did ("and die on the mountain which you ascend...because you broke faith with me in the midst of the people of Israel...; because you did not revere me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel." Num 20:10-13. Deut. 32:50-51. Cf. Num. 27:13-14). I believe that this action of Moses and its consequences in the sight of God would have made its impact on a first-rate seventeenth century mind like that of Milton and would have checked any temptation to take a view such as that which Arthos attributes to the Lady in the poem. The poem, however, itself makes the point sufficiently. The Lady links herself with powers above and below her own in claiming that her threat could be carried out--if she and the powers to which she is allied in perfect unity of intent should choose. Also, as I try to show in discussing the brother's speech, he himself suggests a distinction between the Lady's power over natural creatures and over unnatural influences: he seems less sure that her power extends to the latter ("some say," he says), and the action of the poem bears out this qualification of her possible power. As for ^{escaping death}, the poem does not deal with this (at most it suggests the kind of faith that would not be overthrown by the fact of death, as will be discussed).

In science, one chooses the theory that accounts for the most facts and occurrences while introducing the least complicating factors. In this poem faith as an action of the mind and grace as God's mediating action upon and by means of all kinds of limited created powers seems to me

the view that gives unity to everything the poem presents. There is no question of the importance of Platonism to the poem's thought, but I am as convinced that the thought of the poem in its unifying simplicity of movement is controlled by Christian convictions as Arthos is that "the Platonic argument is primary" and that chastity in the poem is "primarily a philosophic virtue." I certainly agree that Plato's *Charmides* affects the poem's thought--the reference to haemony leads our minds to just this reference. But the "health of mind" the Lady thinks of is not simply that of Socrates. To make it coincide, Arthos has to make an assumption which I do not see that the poem requires. He has to say that by changing charity to chastity Milton transformed charity "into a philosophic virtue" and that "the virtues represented by Faith and Hope would likely be comparably secularized." So many things in the poem go against this view, things which I have sought to take account of in the interpretation I have given. The Lady's mind is filled with images of faith and she maintains a simple and consistent holiness of attitude.

Searle Jayne has recently suggested that the poem involves "a relation between the realms of divine and natural providence" (537). He believes that Milton relied on Ficino's Christian Platonism, which accounts for the identity of Christian and Platonic theologies (535). Such a view holds the promise of a real understanding of the poem's unity. But it seems to me that Searle, like Arthos, does not make enough of the fact that no source can be held to account for what Milton does with it. Not only does Jayne's explication in terms of allegory, especially that of the haemony passage, seem to me unsupported by the evidence of the poem, but his interpretation of Jove as the "World-Soul" of Ficino (535) runs counter to the whole movement of the Lady's mind.

Svendson shows convincingly that Milton's conception of the cosmos, inhabited by living powers, was "hallowed by centuries of poets" and "absorbed into a teleological world-view" that was "the Christian world-view" (84-85 and 226). Milton had a mind sufficiently independent to use both popular conceptions of Platonism and Plato's own thought to express his Christian faith--here a faith in a single guiding grace whose power is precisely to renew the free though bounded power of all created nature. This constitutes a more consistent development of a common Puritan view. Nuttall refers to Richard Baxter's "insistence that God's Spirit 'worketh on man as man,' on the whole man, and primarily by the normal activities of man's reason and conscience" (169). Milton extended the view, not without precedents, to all created natures. (For Milton's independence in his use of sources, see Whiting, 365-367.)

Most of the difficulties in the reading of the poem and

the failure finally to find in it a simple unity seem to me to come about when the reader tries to find in it a consistent philosophy independent from its source in grace. Instead of this, Milton seems to me to be presenting a philosophy of faith, which explains his freedom in his adaptation of his sources and in his use of numerous sources other than philosophy to advance the thought. One of the advances Milton appears to me to have been making to support Christians in their individual lives is his interpretation of the order and consistency by which God always intervenes and the care he always has for faithful men, not just when virtue and philosophy become inadequate. Nearly everything that Arthos discovers in the Charmides and Ficino would apply just as well, with far less need for shifting ordinary meanings of the concepts Milton depended on, if grace is taken to be the power that makes the mind's own virtue possible. To me this makes the poem as a whole become a bolder and more understandable work, for it becomes an advance upon a Christian faith his listeners and readers would have followed readily (as really the attendant Spirit at the poem's close so simply expressed his hope that they would). Virtue alone is free because virtue is the character of an individual's life when he abides in grace. Long before Milton had understood the need for grace: "Grazia sola" he had said even in the Italian poems, and yearned to become soil for Him who plants from heaven. His mind came to be steeped in such convictions of the gracing power God gives--the early Horton poems show this to be so. Lycidas too was to rely on this conviction. With so much in the present poem to support a similar view it hardly seems possible that Milton could have been taking a view so different from that expressed in earlier and later poems or that his primary interests here could have been other than Christian ones. But it is the evidence in the poem that convinces me of this and that makes possible a recognition of the poem's unity in all of its details.

Milton was not turning back on the fundamental Protestant perception--he was boldly and rigorously advancing it. "My strength is made perfect in your weakness" was what Paul believed God to have said to him. We know from Milton's later autographed inscriptions that this thought became one which he singled out to share (CE XVIII:271). A Mask, from beginning to end, appears to me to tell us of this truth, that in mere mortals who keep steadily mindful of God's influence real strength results--their strength now because God (by reason of his Son) chooses that it should be so.

Milton was a Protestant--this accounts for the primacy of grace in his poem. Milton was a Platonist--this accounts for the rich depiction that he gives of how grace is carried out. Milton was a Puritan--this accounts for the seriousness of his concern for man's fidelity. Milton was original and independent in his thought--this accounts for the advances that he made on Christian views. But in everything

Faith, Hope and Chastity are given man not in some eternal realm but here; they are the realities that grace the Lady's own mind and that give her the strength of conviction to say she now believes

That he, the Supreme good, t'whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
Would send a glist'ring Guardian, if need were,
To keep my life and honour unassail'd. (217-220)

This is the conviction of a human faith, Jesus' own faith when he said: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53). It is the faith that knows it can rely on God's own grace. The miracle of confirmation which the Lady receives is one of physical sight.

Was I deceiv'd, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
I did not err, there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
And casts a gleam over this tufted Grove.
(221-225)

To such eyes of faith the tangled wood itself becomes a "tufted Grove." The simplicity of Warton's comments on these lines seems to me as rightly childlike as what has been happening before the eyes of our imagination in the poem: "The repetition, arising from the conviction and confidence of an unaccusing conscience, is inimitably beautiful. When all succour seems to be lost, Heaven unexpectedly presents the silver lining of a sable cloud to the virtuous" (Todd, IV:90). Milton presents and Warton recognizes a kind of faith not unlike that expressed by the Nativity narratives in Luke. And for the Lady, as for the

childlike reader of those narratives, what happens is that "new enliv'n'd spirits" prompt her life. She lives now by the consciousness of God's gifts to her own mind and by her faith that these gifts active in the mind and conscience, and if need be God's own watchful power, will protect her life. Milton gives the Lady in her youthful way a mind informed by Paul:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
 Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution,
 or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword...?
 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors
 through him who loved us. (Rom. 8:35, 37)

For Faith and Hope and Chastity are virtues that derive from Christ. Thus, with "new enliv'n'd spirits" (her own spirits) prompting her, the Lady is now ready to act.

Her first act is to seek the kind of help that one may reasonably expect to have when lost in some dark woods of earth--an Echo of a voice that calls for help. This is "Sweet Echo, sweetest Nymph that liv'st unseen" (230)--one of those unseen beings that hovers closest to the childlike mind. Echo is artistically the perfect power for the Lady to call on at this point because she fits precisely into the context of the thought that has just been developed. She lives "unseen" within an "aery shell," but on the earth, and it is to earthly voices that she responds. She is "Daughter of the Sphere" in the same kind of way as the "Sphere-born harmonious Sisters, Voice, and Verse," of At a Solemn Music. They were able to "pierce" "Dead things with inbreath'd sense," and their sounds, although called

"divine sounds," could only "to our high-raised phantasy present/ That undisturbed Song of pure concent." They were given the substance of the likeness to heavenly harmony that faith can give, and this Nymph Echo is even more dependent on this faith, for she can only be responsive to the human voice. It is the Lady who sings, and it is Echo's requested responsiveness to the voice of faith by which she may be "translated to the skies,/ And give resounding grace to all Heav'n's Harmonies" (242-243). She too, like faith, is "untranslated" to heaven as yet, and is responsive, if at all, only to the likeness of such harmony in earthly forms of faith. As Warton noted, "Milton has used her much more rationally than most of his brother mask-writers" (Todd, IV:93).

The limitations of Echo's influence are made clear at once. For by the ironies that Jove himself perhaps permits, it is not the brothers but Comus who hears the echoing song and comes. Comus himself has the power to understand what is happening in the Lady's act of singing. This human voice itself expresses "Divine enchanting ravishment." Some unseen heavenly power "moves the vocal air/ To testify his hidd'n residence" (246-247). "To testify" is what Christians believe that God does by his new covenant. He makes the "pledges" of grace and faith effectual on earth, through persons who express their faith.

It is precisely the "home-felt delight" which Comus senses in her voice that describes the unique likeness to

heaven that faith can give the earth and that makes the earth, as another poet has said, "the right place for love." This "home-felt" quality throughout the poem is what underscores the subordination of all the Platonic philosophy to Christian faith. For it is not Platonism but faith that gives to earth a "home-felt" character that best describes the character of the poem. In spite of its innumerable sources, Milton's poem has a uniquely fresh impact that it makes--the impact of faith on human character.

In his comparison of the Lady's voice with that of his mother Circe with the Sirens, Comus makes an important contrast between two theories of art. The aim of the first kind of art is to please and to wrap up the senses in their own delight and make the things of earth appear so lovely in themselves that one has thought for nothing else but self and them. The aim of the second is to serve, to awaken the senses to the richness of the correspondence between heaven and all the earth and help the mind live wakefully on earth by the "sober certainty," the faith of "waking" or beginning "bliss." The Lady's song makes the mind and all the senses want to come alive for God, while Circe's kind of song puts the mind to sleep. The one makes mad, the other restores the mind to sanity.

...I have oft heard
 My mother Circe with the Sirens three,

 Yet they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,
 And in sweet madness rob'd it of it self,
 But such a sacred, and home-felt delight,
 Such sober certainty of waking bliss
 I never heard till now. (253-254, 260-264)

Comus, however, in his kind of madness, can hear but cannot change. The grace which the Lady's voice conveys has no effectual power over him such as it has even over the darkness in which he reigns--for he confesses that her voice smoothed "the Raven down/ Of darkness till it smil'd" (251-252). His smiles are different, for all he can think of is to try to make her his Queen, and so he seeks to win her first by praise directed to herself. But her song is not his mother's kind of art and springs from another purpose than to win some praise. Her song springs not from the indolent desire for praise but from necessity--the need to call forth help:

Nay gentle Shepherd, ill is lost that praise
That is addrest to unattending Ears;
Not any boast of skill but extreme shift
.....
Compell'd me.... (271-273, 275)

Comus has gained an opening, however, and uses it to try to win her confidence by a false show of concern for her welfare. She herself admits her weariness. He directs her mind at once to thoughts of chance--his way of thinking of the world as though ungraced. Their dialogue, as Hurd has noted, is similar to that of some Greek tragedies (Todd, IV: 98). Comus proves a good dissembler and the Lady trusts the impressions she has been given of him. Trust rather than scepticism of the world and its inhabitants is clearly of her nature--"gentle Shepherd," "Gentle villager," are some of her references to him. Finally she accepts his offer of help and says: "Shepherd, I take thy word,/ And

trust thy honest offer'd courtesy" (322-323). The fact is lightly touched upon here, but since the beginning faith has had to rely on someone's word because in this world grace always has a human point of reference. It is no fault in the Lady that makes this so, as Miss Tuve has finely said: "Men cannot be enabled by virtue always to see through to the true nature of that which, without other sign of evil, simply says it is other than it is; hypocrisy is a vice in the creature seen, not in the judgement behind the seeing eye...." (128). Comus is here the opposite of the messenger of grace--a false shepherd in the same likeness as the true, a human likeness. The Lady's eyes of faith are severely limited to the powers of human sight and consciousness here, as if Milton is saying that faith's eyes must be limited, and by the principles of human faith she cannot reject what his being says it is until his actions or his doctrine prove that being false. It is a limitation always placed on those who look out on the world with eyes of chastity or love, a semblance, not a dissemblance, of God's own. Otherwise the danger exists of pulling up some stalk of wheat instead of tares, as Jesus said.

The Lady, however, is conscious that there is a difference between what seems and what is true. She knows that Courtesy is sometimes "most pretended," although she says that this happens more often in high places than in low. She knows too that it is her very lack of security that makes her more than ever dependent on the seeming Shepherd's help. That there may be further trials ahead

she also knows, and does what she has already demonstrated to be a distinguishing mark of her character--looks to heaven for any necessary help beyond her own. But she knows that any acts of faith must be her own. And so she prays only that Providence "square my trial/ To my proportion'd strength" (329-330). She indulges in no heroics concerning her own powers in this "advent'rous glade." She seems to know that the strongest faith is limited in what it can do and that the trials it is put to must be proportionate to human capability. Whatever the art of governance she has been trained in may have been like, her own use of that art seems never to leave a gracious God out of her sight. It is with prayer for this God's guardianship that she departs with Comus.

The next long scene finds the two brothers on their own. They are affected with the same sense of a "double night of darkness" as the Lady was and like her they call on the stars and moon as elements, not of the fates, but love. It is nature's light they call upon to "disinherit" the "Chaos" of a night more dark than nature's own. It is nature, nature's creatures and human nature itself that both brothers call upon for solace in such dark. It is the "home-felt" cheerfulness that earth can give that they want:

...might we but hear
 The folded flocks penn'd in their wattled cotes,
 Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops,
 Or whistle from the Lodge, or village cock
 Count the night watches to his feathery Dames,
 "Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering
 (343-348)

Neither nature nor human lowliness is chaotic or evil in their sight; both are ordering influences--in correspondence with the light of stars, a mere candle of some "clay habitation" is seen to be a "long levell'd rule of streaming light."

Tillyard may not be right in calling Comus "an experiment in drama," because there is no resolution of the action based on any development of character. But he is right in calling attention, as in part he does, to the fact that these characters are limited in outlook.¹² Even more important, they are made to appear proportioned in their intellectual powers and certainly at different stages in the degree of understanding they have reached. There may not be dramatic conflict but there is contrast in the characters here. The speeches of the brothers appear to confirm a suggestion of the Lady's reference to "proportion'd strength" that individuals have differing and perhaps developing proportions of insight and virtue in their characters. At least the brothers' differing insights appear not only to embellish but to contrast with the Lady's own. There is, I would think, a principle of growth in understanding and in the strength of virtue intended here, although the growth itself is not evidenced demonstrably.

¹²Milton, 66 ff.

Warton says that "this dialogue between the two Brothers, is an amicable contest between fact and philosophy. The younger draws his arguments from common apprehension, and the obvious appearance of things: the elder proceeds on a profounder knowledge, and argues from abstracted principles" (Todd, IV:116). The outlook of the brothers appears more intellectual than the Lady's own: the one is more continuously factual in his fears and reasoning, the other more reliant on the strength of insight and of virtue given by philosophy than the Lady herself appears to me to be. Beyond this, there is a quality to her language which is lacking in theirs, a quality which I am inclined to call a warmth of spirit, of personableness, and attribute to a fuller degree of faith, a more conscious sense of guiding grace than either of the brothers have. It is not that they are unconscious of God's influence but that they have not taken it to heart as much as she. With them, their understanding is more a conception than a power. And this gives good reason for the attendant Spirit to come to them instead of to the Lady first of all: for even with him present they prove more inclined to act rashly on their own than she ever does. I would think that Milton gave an intellectual quality to their thoughts intentionally and that he meant to call attention in this way to the contrast of their views with hers.

But these are limitations--there remains the power of truth in both their views. The younger brother is troubled by fantasies much like the Lady herself was first of all,

although these are for him properly more "Savage" and less seductive in character. He does not foresee the subtler kind of evil Comus proves to be but only the potential consequences of his subtlety. The Elder Brother clearly sees that the vision of fears cannot help at all, whether the fears prove to be real or imagined ones. He is rightly convinced that his sister is above the power of the fears themselves and partly gives the reason why she is. She is not, he believes,

...so unprincip'l'd in virtue's book,
And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever,
As that the single want of light and noise
.....
Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,
And put them into mis-becoming plight.

(366-369, 371-372)

But he seems more satisfied with "Wisdom's self" than the Lady in her own speech proved to be. And I think he has not fathomed, as she has, why it is so true that:

Virtue could see to do what virtue would
By her own radiant light, though Sun and Moon
Were in the flat Sea sunk. (373-375)

For her light was not just that of reason but of faith, that looked directly to the virtues only grace can give, because she knew she needed not just the power of reason but of another abiding power in her life. He understands, but not entirely. Virtue's "radiant light" corresponds in its profounder form to that light of the "traveller's benison," the moon, and to the "long levell'd rule of streaming light" that comes from some ordinary home. But these do not require "symbolic significance" to be meaningful as creation's form of grace. Nor do we have to think the Elder Brother is

all-wise if we apply Miss Tuve's helpful interpretation at this point not to the brother but to the Lady herself in her greater understanding of the facts of grace:

We have already seen too many symbolic appearances of light to rate this trust in it as self-sufficiency Moreover, the continuation, by contrasting the enslavement of the man of dark soul, clarifies the fact that this inner light which keeps the will free to elect virtuous action is scarcely to be confused with stoic pride. (150)

Again, the emphatic correspondence between the helpful lights of nature and the reasonable light of faith seems to me to rule out any supposed contrast between nature's potential misguidance and the true guidance of divinity. It is some other power than nature's that casts a misleading spell and by what it does seeks to overwhelm both nature and man in the harmony which in some measure they share.¹³ Because mindfulness is the character of faith, however, it remains essential to see that throughout the poem reason and that strong-siding champion, Conscience, which directs the reason's sight to God, are the Lady's links with Heaven. What these links accomplish is to make grace an effectual power on earth, by means of human faith.

The Elder Brother, however, does not see all this which it appears to me that the Lady is made to see so well. His is a limited understanding of the truth of faith. He knows that mere darkness without danger won't unnerve his sister. But Warton's stricture that a parenthetical state-

¹³Cf. Arthos, On "A Mask", 20.

ment must have special force to be inserted at all applies most surely here when the Elder Brother inserts into his speech the clause:

(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)
(370)

For his speech has not cancelled out the justice of the younger brother's fears. He makes no claim that Wisdom or Contemplation will secure her in the event that danger should prove real. On the contrary, he is quite conscious that "Wisdom's self" flourishes in "sweet retired Solitude" and that "in the various bustle of resort" the wings that Wisdom grows "Were all to-ruffl'd, and sometimes impair'd" (380).

The younger brother, in his somewhat childish but perhaps still childlike way, sees some things about which the elder brother does not speak. And this is where Tillyard's initiating insight (whether or not he sought to make too much of it) appears most justified. For he has seen the hints that there is some kind of "dramatic" contrast here and that we are not being given a simple hierarchy of truth step-wise in the ascending personages of three characters. The younger brother makes his point quite well: a hermit may have protection enough in the wisdom he pursues uninterruptedly, but virtue is beautiful and in need of help. He has his realistic strength of character when he says:

You may as well spread out the unsunn'd heaps
Of Miser's treasure by an out-law's den,
And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope
Danger will wink on Opportunity,
And let a single helpless maiden pass
Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste.
Of night, or loneliness it reck's me not,
I fear the dread events.... (398-405)

He knows that evil and not just his sister's sweet form of holiness may well walk these woods.

There is a clear suggestion that the Elder Brother may have been caught a little short in his reasoning up to this point when he admits for the first time in answer to his brother that there may be some real cause for fear, but that:

...where an equal poise of hope and fear
Does arbitrate th'event, my nature is
That I incline to hope, rather than fear,
(410-412)

It is only now that "white-handed Hope" comes into the picture that his mind presents. And I think it fair to say that it is the younger brother's valid fears that raise the Elder Brother's thoughts. They are raised at this point and it is now that his maturer views come into their own, even though the younger brother is more prompt to look to heaven itself for help, so that even now they both tend to stress different sides of the single truth which their sister's understanding sees so well.

The Elder Brother says that the younger one has forgotten their sister's "hidden strength," and in reply to the Second Brother's question he makes it clear that he does not mean "the strength of Heav'n," but her own. Though Heav'n may have give it, he says, it "may be term'd her own." This human virtue which he refers to is chastity, and he proceeds to speak about what the Lady later calls "the sage/ And serious doctrine of Virginity," describing what his sister earlier has spoken of as a Christian virtue in both popular and Platonic terms. He first refers to the possessor

of chastity as being "clad in complete steel," and says that no natural creature "will dare to soil her Virgin purity" (427). It is not the steel-like quality of chastity that prevents them, however, but "the sacred rays of Chastity," by which, presumably, the creatures of the natural world are awed. The key to such power, however, is humility. The chaste person has the influence of the "sacred rays" so long as her walking is "not done in pride or in presumption." There is a clear suggestion here that the power of chastity derives from some divine influence, although it is the person's own virtue that affirms or gives expression to this power. The accuracy of his doctrine up to this point has been confirmed in terms of the poem by the effect of the Lady's song to Echo. There she did affect even "darkness till it smil'd" and there is every indication that if Comus' powers had merely been natural or human he himself would have stood in reverent awe of "such Divine enchanting ravishment."

The Elder Brother has been completely affirmative up to this point. But now he introduces his assertions concerning the power of chastity over evil spirits with the rather equivocal phrase, "Some say":

Some say no evil thing that walks by night

 Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity.
 (432, 437)

The enchanting picture that follows is based on folklore, derived from Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess. (Cf. Todd, IV:114). It does not seem to me that he is quite so

sure of himself at this point, because the examples that he goes on to give from "Antiquity" concern the chastity of Nymphs and Goddesses and not human beings at all. This limitation imposed upon his sense of certainty is consistent with the subsequent action of the poem. Comus' magic does in part prevail and it becomes apparent that some power beyond that of chastity itself is needed to safeguard and free the chaste Lady. Chastity appears to be a power that, by its very humility perhaps, calls other powers of grace to her assistance; and consistently throughout the poem it proves necessary to have some other powers to help. The poem affirms not just a correspondence but a mutual interdependence of any number of powers, beginning with Jove's grace in commanding the attendant Spirit to descend. Before the poem is ended a whole network of powers is called upon, each seemingly governed ultimately by Jove. The full force of the poem's conception is that of corresponding, interdependent powers, natural, human and divine, each with its boundaries and limited in its power. This, I would think the poem is meant to say, is how God brings all things to work together for good. And human chastity--utter fidelity, true holiness, the love that lives by faith and hope--is the human God-likeness that can call forth (because of grace) these various corresponding powers. True faith, bounded by its own humility, supported by a network of correspondingly bounded but effectually gracing powers: this is basically a conception of God's general revelation throughout the universe, renewing it in power and effectually supporting

the microcosmic human life because of that life's faith in a special revelation that made such faith both possible and effectual. It is, in fact, implicitly an affirmation of the decisive power of Christ, for without him there would have been no faith or hope of saintly chastity. Implicitly, the poem makes that affirmation all along.

What the brother then proceeds to do is to utilize some Platonic conceptions to explicate some Christian beliefs. The Christian doctrine is set forth first:

So dear to Heav'n is Saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried Angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
(453-456)

It is not just evils but things of "sin and guilt" that angels are sent to drive off when saintliness on earth is genuine. And it is the angels who "in clear dream and solemn vision/ Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear" (457-458). It is divinely given powers which attend and aid that make the human dream and vision possible. This is the inspiration of true thoughts by "converse with heav'nly habitants"--not directly heard but in dream and vision.

The effect of such "converse," however, comes through the mind; it is what is told her, the act of conversing with heavenly inhabitants that affects her being. The effect is that such a person begins to be renewed in soul and body both:

Till oft converse with heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th'outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,

And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal: (459-463)

But the passage must be read in its entirety from line 453 to see the full scope of the conception being expressed. For all this begins to happen because "Saintly chastity" is "so dear to Heav'n" and the "soul" who is "found sincerely so" is given renewing insights. It is the continued inspiration of the mind that makes it possible for some unseen influence (perhaps the mind itself, perhaps some power that the mind's steadfastness allows to work) "to cast a beam on th'outward shape/ The unpolluted temple of the mind."

Perhaps no one has ever yet adequately explicated such beliefs in words; I believe that Milton makes the Elder Brother attempt to do so but that he no more than others succeeds, because at its base such doctrine depends on utter mystery--not necessarily magic or even mysticism, but mystery. Men do not know how what is said can come about; they only know that in this life there can be some real measure of renewal of the mind in a way that affects the passions and the body in their sense of purity. And if some find Platonism to explicate this fact sufficiently and others Christian faith and grace, this is all right. But here we must do our best to read the poem itself with fidelity to what Milton is trying to convey.

I believe that the attempted explication of the Christian doctrine derives from Plato's Phaedo, as is suggested by the following passages:

The soul of a philosopher...will calm passion, and follow reason, and dwell in the contemplation of her, beholding the true and divine (which is not matter of opinion), and thence deriving nourishment. Thus she seeks to live while she lives, and after death she hopes to go to her own kindred and to that which is like her, and to be freed from human ills. (84. Vol. I: 459)

It may be said, indeed, that without bones and muscles and the other parts of the body I cannot execute my purposes. But to say that I do as I do because of them, and that this is the way in which mind acts, and not from the choice of the best, is a very careless and idle mode of speaking.... Of the obligatory and containing power of the good they think nothing; and yet this is the principle which I would fain learn if any one would teach me.

(99. Vol. I:483)

...I know nothing and can understand nothing of any other of those wise causes which are alleged; and if a person says to me that the bloom of colour, or form, or any such thing is a source of beauty, I leave all that, which is only confusing to me, and simply and singly, and perhaps foolishly, hold and am assured in my own mind that nothing makes a thing beautiful but the presence and participation of beauty in whatever way or manner obtained; for as to the manner I am uncertain, but I stoutly contend that by beauty all things become beautiful. This appears to me to be the safest answer which I can give, either to myself or to another, and to this I cling, in the persuasion that this principle will never be overthrown....

(100. Vol. I:484-485)

But then, O my friends, he said, if the soul is really immortal, what care should be taken of her, not only in respect of the portion of time which is called life, but of eternity?... But now, inasmuch as the soul is manifestly immortal, there is no release or salvation from evil except the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom. (107. Vol. I:492)

Also I believe that the earth is very vast, and that we inhabit a small portion only about the sea.... But the true earth is pure and situated in the pure heaven.... But we who live in these hollows are deceived.... But the fact is, that owing to our feebleness and sluggishness we are prevented from reaching the surface of the air: for if any man could arrive at the exterior limit, or take the wings of a bird and come to the top...he would see a world beyond; and, if the nature of man could sustain the sight, he would acknowledge that this other world was the place of the true heaven and the true light and the true earth.... And there are animals and men, some in a

middle region, others dwelling about the air as we dwell about the sea.... Moreover...they...have sight and hearing and smell, and all the other senses, in far greater perfection, in the same proportion that air is purer than water or the ether than air. Also they have temples and sacred places in which the gods really dwell, and they hear their voices and receive their answers, and are conscious of them and hold converse with them; and they see the sun, moon, and stars as they truly are, and their other blessedness is of a piece with this.

(110-111. Vol. I:494 f.)

The Elder Brother's description of the "imbruted" souls, "Lingering, and sitting by a new made grave,/ As loath to leave the body that it lov'd," further substantiates the conclusion that the Phaedo is the chief influence on the shape the thought is given in the poem at this point. For this is exactly the description given by Socrates in the Phaedo, as Todd has noted (Todd, IV:117):

But the soul which has been polluted, and is impure at the time of her departure, and is the companion and servant of the body always, and is in love with and fascinated by the body and by the desires and pleasures of the body, until she is led to believe that the truth only exists in a bodily form, which a man may touch and see and taste, and use for the purposes of his lusts,-- the soul, I mean, accustomed to hate and fear and avoid the intellectual principle, which to the bodily eye is dark and invisible, and can be attained only by philosophy;--do you suppose that such a soul will depart pure and unalloyed?

She is held fast by the corporeal.... And this corporeal element, my friend, is heavy and weighty and earthy, and is that element of sight by which a soul is depressed and dragged down again into the visible world, because she is afraid of the invisible and of the world below--prowling about tombs and sepulchres, near which, as they tell us, are seen certain ghostly apparitions of souls which have not departed pure, but are cloyed with sight and therefore visible.

(81. Vol. I:466)

Even in accordance with the doctrine of the Phaedo, Milton would have felt free to change some of the details of what

was said:

A man of sense ought not to say, nor will I be very confident, that the description which I have given of the soul and her mansions is exactly true. But I do say that, inasmuch as the soul is shown to be immortal, he may venture to think, not improperly or unworthily, that something of the kind is true.
(115. Vol. I:498)

Nevertheless, the context and the very language of the lines in the poem oblige us to remember that it is Christian doctrine that is being explicated here and that philosophy is being made to serve the Christian truth. For the emphasis of the Phaedo is not upon the transformation of the body and senses into something pure but upon the soul's release from them. This is clearly evident in the Phaedo 65, 67, 83 and 114. The reader must remember that Socrates' convictions were being expressed in the light of his impending death and that aside from this his emphases could have been different. But in the Phaedo as we are given it the physical and sensible, while it is shown some respect, is not highly valued. For Socrates says that "in this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible intercourse or communion with the body...." (67. Vol. I:450). This could possibly be interpreted to mean the unwholesome aspects of the body. But in the "purer earth" itself, the highest life to be given to a few is an unbodied one:

Those too who have been pre-eminent for holiness of life are released from this earthly prison, and go to their pure home which is above, and dwell in the purer earth; and of these, such as have duly purified themselves with philosophy live henceforth altogether without the body, in mansions fairer still...
(114. Vol. I:498)

The Elder Brother takes a different view at this point than Socrates. For he says that the "beam" that begins to be cast turns the body "by degrees" to the "soul's essence," until all is "made immortal." Behind the philosophy are Christian terms of a renewal by grace: the beam begins to cast, and the body is affected by degrees. Of course, these in themselves could be construed as Platonic terms as well, but only if they are isolated from the total context and predominant language and imagery of the poem. There is no question that the total context is a Christian one. But I think that it is possible to be more definite. The Christian doctrine which Plato's philosophy is used to explicate is fundamentally that of Paul. The key line for believing this is that which speaks of

The unpolluted temple of the mind. (461)

For that is the language of Pauline thought, as is the passage following it:

...when lust
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being.
(463-469)

The thought depends upon the conception of the *imago dei*, the God-likeness given to the "first being" of man. And Paul's own explication of how this *imago dei* begins to be renewed and made an effectual influence in human life is nearly sufficient for the interpretation of these lines. For Milton is concerned with body and soul.

Todd has noted that Jesus stressed the lustful influence of "unchaste looks" upon the soul (Todd, IV:117): "But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). But the passage from Paul that appears to me to control the thought of Milton's poem at this point is Romans 12:1-2.

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This forms the basis for the healthy doctrine of chastity which Milton gives in the poem as a whole. Everything is there--a presentation of oneself to God in holiness, a transformation by the renewal of the mind, a recognition that there can be that which is good and acceptable in human life. It is on such convictions that all the other explication in the poem depends, as it did for so much of Paul's explication of his doctrines too. There are countless other passages in Paul which confirm this view. Here are just a few. On the need for heavenly powers to help to make the "clear dream and solemn vision" true, Paul says: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought.... the spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27). On the whole perplexing contrast between the imbruting power of "low-thoughted care" and the renewing power that mindfulness of God can give because of faith in Christ, Paul is the

authority:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Rom. 7:24-25)

Like Paul, Milton in this poem consistently depends upon the renewing power of faith to give some kind of effectual deliverance. There is not a passage of the poem in which faith as an active power of the mind is left out; and there are very few which do not give a strong sense of supporting grace. I do not think that we come to terms with the basic conception of the poem if we do not stress these facts. It is the unseen power of the Spirit to renew coupled with consistent human mindfulness which shapes the thought and to which the Platonism and all the other sources are made subordinate. In the poem it is the setting of the mind on heavenly things that in this life gives "life and peace," in accordance with what Paul had said:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
(Rom. 8:5-6)

The consequence of such graced mindfulness is the discovery, for Paul as for Milton in this poem, that there are powers at work for good within the world.

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.
(Rom. 8:28)

This is the conviction of the poem, and it depends entirely on faith. For Paul too, the whole conception leads not to a

rejection of the goods of earthly life but to a calling forth of life to something good: "Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought of what is noble in the sight of all.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17, 21). That is the duty of chastity: not to negate but to make this life a life of holiness. Paul is later very explicit on this point and speaks directly to the meaning of this poem:

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?... For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

(1 Cor. 3:16-17)

For Paul and Milton and the Lady in the poem, we do not best know God when we have "the least possible...communion with the body" but when this body serves to glorify its God. There are passages in Paul's writings that point conclusively to his doctrine as the source of Milton's thought:

Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything.... The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!... But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

(1 Cor. 5:7-8; 6:12-20)

It is because the "glorious liberty of the children of God" has already begun that Paul can say: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). That is what the Lady appears to me to seek to do: in all her living to "do all to the glory of God." That is why she can be compared to the goddess Minerva, whose "noble grace"... "Dash't brute violence/ With sudden adoration, and blank awe" (452-453). Milton understood that there is beauty to holiness because, as Osgood has said, "beauty is an intrinsic element of the Faith, whether it is manifest in a person, a service, a ministration, a tone of voice, a building or a dooryard" (19). This grace of being depends upon the mind, and the Lady's "hidden strength" of chastity is known by the renewing of her mind. It is by taking "every thought captive," as Paul says, that she is able to be armored with the strength her brother mentions and which Comus later feels in much the way that Paul himself describes:

...for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.... (2 Cor. 10:4-5)

In the poem it is by such means that chastity becomes a force to thwart evil and make life good, because the Lady is mindful of the powers with which heaven graces earth.

My conclusion is that the "divine philosophy" which the younger brother praises is that necessary explication of the truth given by God's revelation. I read the phrase as it is used here to mean philosophy in which God guides

the thought. For there is substantial evidence in the preceding lines that whatever philosophy is present to be praised subserves the Christian doctrine that is paramount. In fact, "divine Philosophy" appears in the context to be a term that would include all Christian thought directed to a person's way of life, in much the manner that Erasmus has already been noted to have liked to speak of the "philosophy of Christ." But it is perhaps unwise to overstress such points. The poem gives its own proper weights and emphases: the poetic intent of the passage on divine Philosophy is, I believe, to make the listener aware of the charm that the mindful life of chastity is endowed with in contrast to a thoughtless life of sensuality.

How charming is divine Philosophy.
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns. (476-479)

Finally, the brothers' conversation is brought to a close by prayers for heaven's help, as the unknown footsteps of the attendant Spirit remind them of the potential danger to themselves and their sister: "Heav'n keep my sister! /.../...and Heav'n be for us." Whatever the powers of the mind may be, it is heaven that is called upon for help. It should be noted too that the brothers, when confronted by potential danger, do not rely on anything like the "complete steel" of chastity themselves, but on their swords. Since it is the Elder Brother who shouts the warning to heed the "iron stakes," it would seem that the younger brother's arguments have not entirely lost out.

"Heav'n be for us" means, among other things, may God give us strength if we have to fight.

It is now that the attendant Spirit comes, and from the time that the brothers first look upon him he appears to them as their "father's Shepherd sure." Again the point is stressed that this power sent from above at Jove's own command takes a human form in his action on the earth. The correspondence and interdependence of heavenly grace and earthly faith could hardly be expressed more consistently.

The Spirit tells them at once that his present concern is above all his other ordinary shepherd's cares, because his coming concerns the welfare of "my Virgin Lady." Here we see him clearly distinguished from the Genius of the wood in Arcades. Although he seems to take a lower likeness, he has a higher function to fulfill.

The brothers' statement that "without blame,/ Or our neglect, we lost her as we came" reminds the reader that Comus' opportunity does not depend on anybody's present error or sinful acts but on that kind of unexpected happening that may take the best of people by surprise. The Spirit himself is not above expressing fears over such eventualities: "Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true" (511). He then proceeds in a very compelling way to affirm the ancient belief in evil powers:

... 'tis not vain or fabulous,
 (Though so esteem'd by shallow ignorance)
 What the sage Poets taught by th' heav'nly Muse
 Storied of old in high immortal verse
 Of dire Chimeras and enchanted Isles,
 And rifted Rocks whose entrance leads to hell,
 For such there be, but unbelief is blind. (513-519)

It is not the Spirit who denies the existence of unseen evil in the world; he calls them to believe that men must be wary of such powers on earth. His whole purpose in coming depends on this, for he cannot guide or properly "attend" unless they take the need quite seriously. It is "unbelief" that is blind, not just to heaven's good but to evil as well.

In his long speech that follows, the Spirit then re-affirms much of the substance of the thought expressed in the poem up to this point--one of several notable efforts to give clarity to the meaning of the poem. Comus' skill is that of "witcheries" and it is by the deceit of "sly enticement" that he trips up the mind. The mind is directed downward by the invitation of "many baits and guileful spells" given to "th' unwary sense." The whole point would seem to be that something else than nature traps a man, although it does so through the opening that his senses give. The *imago dei* and its defacement is related strictly here to mindfulness, even as the outward features are reaffirmed to have a rightful part in this. For what takes place when the "pleasing poison" is drunk is the "unmoulding" of "reason's mintage/ Character'd in the face." The phrasing supports a Pauline and Platonic interpretation of the poem as against a Neoplatonic one.

The Spirit reasserts a favorite theme of Milton--the harmlessness and pleasure of innocent contemplation inspired by the scenes of earth:

I sat me down to watch upon a bank
 With Ivy canopied, and interwove
 With flaunting Honey-suckle, and began,
 Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy,
 To meditate my rural minstrelsy,
 Till fancy had her fill; (543-548)

The mood, though quieter, is similar to that of Il Penseroso, and affirms that mere "fancy" has a right to sing of the "home-felt" delights to which the thoughts of earth give rise. The passage helps to give freshness to the poem's thought. The Spirit goes on to describe the Lady's Song to Echo as itself so lovely that it "might create a soul/ Under the ribs of Death" (561-562). The Spirit, although he was able to see "that damn'd wizard hid in sly disguise," could not intervene directly. In fact he ran to bring the very human help of the brothers for which the Lady called.

In their response to what the Spirit tells them, the brothers show that in their way they are being tried or tested too. The first brother has his fears come back to him, but they are accurately directed now. For he sees that the real threat is one that derives its power from hell: O night and shades,/ How are ye join'd with hell in triple knot" (580-581). Against this accurately delineated source of evil his faith quails and it is the Elder Brother who, faced by this ultimate source of evil, has the courage to reaffirm his faith. He sees that what "erring men call Chance" is evil's design and that there is a "trial" required in the face of this:

...against the threats
 Of malice or of sorcery, or that power
 Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm;
 Virtue may be assail'd, but never hurt,

Surpris'd by unjust force, but not enthrall'd,
 Yea even that which mischief meant most harm
 Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
 (586-592)

As Todd says, "Religion here gave energy to the poet's strains" (Todd, IV:128). For this is Paul's conviction re-expressed. Evil may attack--the brother sees this now--but may never finally vanquish good. His confidence depends upon an eternal, not a temporal, consummation of good. It is to that which he looks when he says:

...evil on itself shall back recoil,
 And mix no more with goodness, when at last
 Gather'd like scum, and settl'd to itself,
 It shall be in eternal restless change
 Self-fed and self-consum'd; if this fail,
 The pillar'd firmament is rott'nness,
 And earth's base built on stubble. (593-599)

This is a stronger reaffirmation of the faith expressed in Milton's poem On Time. The suggestion is given that the injury (and by implication even the death) of the innocent is not sufficient reason to despair. The criterion given for the joined power of grace and faith is that the virtuous cannot be "enthrall'd" in spirit against their will. That is part of the reason why it can be said that for the faithful "in everything God works for good with those who love him." Paul has explicated the conviction in its definitive form:

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor

life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-39)

The elder Brother has not been pressed in his faith as far as Paul, but the language that he uses is so strong and his conception so dependent on an eternal consummation that one gathers he could take the final step if it were needed. And it is this same conviction that nothing "in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God" that the Lady holds to when she discovers just who Comus is. It is the holiness of chastity that matters most--that and the mind's faith that it is being blessed somehow. The consciousness that God's concern is present with one's own and that nothing is more powerful than that is what makes "even that which mischief meant most harm" a "happy trial" which will "prove most glory."

The Elder Brother, however, is still inclined to the rashness that can go with courage, and he needs the attendant Spirit's guidance at this point. For he would charge Comus with his sword unaided on his own. He forgets that it takes more than human power to drag one like Comus "to a foul death." The Spirit has to tell him that "Far other arms, and other weapons must/ Be those that quell the might of hellish charms" (612-613). The Spirit goes on to say what the Lady herself finds to be true: that unless special aid is given, Comus does have some power over the physical body, just as he has already shown that he can mislead the senses: "He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,/"

And crumble all thy sinews" (614-615).

The Spirit then introduces the famous passage on "Haemony," of which Warton's words can be repeated rather wryly today: "It is not agreed, whether Milton's Haemony is a real or poetical plant" (Todd, IV:132). The lines of the poem itself are certainly evocative to the point of inviting hidden meanings to be found. And Hughes' suggestion of its source in Plato's Charmides would also incline the reader to infer more to the meaning than just the "virtue" of a physical plant or "healing herb." For the physician of Thrace, or Haemonia, who gave Socrates the "kind of leaf," told him that "without the charm the leaf would be of no avail." And Socrates adds that "he who taught me the cure and the charm at the same time added a special direction: 'Let no one,' he said, 'persuade you to cure the head, until he has first given you his soul to be cured by the charm. For this' he said, 'is the great error of our day in the treatment of the human body, that physicians separate the soul from the body.' And he added with emphasis, at the same time making me swear to his words, 'Let no one, however rich, or noble, or fair, persuade you to give him the cure, without the charm.' Now I have sworn, and I must keep my oath, and therefore if you will allow me to apply the Thracian charm first to your soul, as the stranger directed, I will afterwards proceed to apply the cure to your head" (157. Vol. I:6-7). But in spite of the temptations provided to do otherwise, I think Milton's intention in the poem is to provide the physical "root" and "leaf" with

sheerly magical powers. As has been noted, there is no clear indication in the poem to do otherwise.¹⁴ Such an interpretation appears to me to satisfy entirely its poetic function in the poem, for it is used specifically against the power of Comus to charm the senses and chain the body, not against any power he may have over the mind or spirit. On the contrary, the mind and spirit throughout are given their own power or necessary aid in order to remain dis-enthralled. It seems to me that Warton is again right in suggesting that fundamentally Milton had popular folk customs in mind at this point (Todd, IV:133). Furthermore, it conforms to what appears to me to be Milton's deliberate stress on the need for a variety of limited powers from both celestial and earthly created realms in order to carry out Jove's desire to grace the virtuous with his support. Nowhere in the poem, in fact, is grace or Spirit given in any single unifying form, except that, in looking always to Heaven, the microcosmic virtuous life shows its recognition that behind its faith there is this Spirit's power. But in the macrocosm under Jove's control, including the earth upon which Haemony presumably was found, the powers that aid his design for grace are numerous and limited. The attendant Spirit, the brothers, the herb, the water Nymph--it is as though "all things" combine to support the Lady's rational faith and steadfast prayers for Heaven's help. The passage

¹⁴Arthos, On "A Mask", 48 & 72-72, n. 48.

itself closes not with utter confidence in Haemony but with the Elder Brother's prayer that "some good angel bear a shield before us" (658). This invocation of "some good angel," while part of the popular conception of the way God chooses to work through his created hierarchies, makes special sense if the power of haemony is considered to be limited to breaking or thwarting the magic spell of Comus over the body and senses, whereas the soul for its support depends on higher powers.

As the scene changes, Comus and the Lady are seen in a "stately Palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness," including "soft Music" and choice foods. As she refuses his Glass and tries to get up he says to her:

Nay Lady, sit; if I but wave this wand,
Your nerves are all chain'd up in Alabaster,
And you a statue; (659-661)

He clearly has some control over her bodily movements, as he had shown himself to have the power to deceive her senses. It appears to me that this is the only power he does have over her, so long as she keeps her head and exercises her own will. There is some point, I think, in referring to his magic power as Brooks and Hardy do: "The power of his magic, whatever its ultimate source, would appear in its agency and effect more preternatural than supernatural. (194) There is no suggestion given that to "wave this wand" and have its effects felt depends upon a surprisal of her will. It seems to me that the magic he can effectually apply without any assent on the part of the Lady

is entirely below the level of the will--sheer magic, one might say, as contrasted with that form of magic that "might almost be expressed as a conflict of wills."¹⁵ In fact, I would limit the definition of magic, as it pertains to the present poem, to just such acts that take place below the level of the will--as it seems to me Milton himself does limit such references to magic. I have read with close attention the detailed discussion of this matter given by Arthos, in which he regards the magic instruments as neutral and the effective power that of the magic-maker's will over-ruling the will of the one on whom the magic is performed.¹⁶ But there is no suggestion in the poem that the magic instruments fail to have effective power when confronted by a sufficiently strong opposing will. Haemony, for instance, is made to appear most "med'cinal." It seems to me that the conflict of wills, which is most real and crucial to the meaning of the poem, is carried on above the level of magic powers. Milton appears to be consistent throughout the poem in limiting the power of magic, in whoever's hands it may be employed, to the senses and the physical nature; so much so that even should the mind willingly assent to drink the magic potion it would lose its character and become "imbruted" along with the senses and

¹⁵W. R. Halliday, as quoted in Arthos, On "A Mask", 70, n. 34.

¹⁶Arthos, On "A Mask", 43-49 and accompanying notes.

the body. The sphere of magic, I would think, is even more bounded in the poem than that of the gracing powers. This is a poem in which each power, for good or ill, appears to have its limited bounds and place. And magic would seem to be given its popular conception here, as in some way having an objective influence which only a similarly objective counter act of magic could undo. The limitation that Milton places on the popular conception is to confine the acts of magic to the physical and sensible area of life. To refer to other kinds of actions narrated in the poem as being "magical" seems to me to be reading in a different meaning to such acts than Milton intends them to have.

In reply to Comus' threat to wave his wand, the Lady answers:

Fool, do not boast,
 Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind
 With all thy charms, although this corporal rind
 Thou hast immanacl'd, while Heav'n sees good.
(662-665)

In these few words it seems to me that she makes the vital points. His "charms" can enchain her body but no more. She has real freedom of the mind, so that she herself can make decisions and act. But she is very clear in saying that she has such freedom only "while Heav'n sees good." Her freedom itself is dependent on Heaven's continuing grace. And I would think that this is a Christian concept--Paul's own--that sin and corruption and evil in its worst form no longer have controlling power over the human spirit that God has set at liberty.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more?.... For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 4:8-9; 5:1)

This is the conviction in which the Lady appears to stand so firmly, "while Heav'n sees good."

The only argument that Comus can offer against her conviction is that imagination has a right to be supreme.

See, here be all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively.... (668-670)

"Since feeling is first," is the way a poet more recently has put it. It is the old argument, still current in much art and life today, that the imagination and the passions should be free to reign. Comus' so-called "argument from nature" is not that; it is an argument from his own cordial glass, for it is that which he admits can "stir up joy." The appeal to nature is his sly way of misconstruing facts. For it is not by inducing her to follow nature, as he knows so well, that he is going to be able to work any change. That change will come only if he can induce her to take his drink and, in effect, worship the imagination and passions instead of God. It is the "cov'nants" of nature's "trust" that he appeals to, for he knows that if he is to move the Lady's religious nature, he must win her to pledge allegiance to another loyalty. He knows that he needs to break her faith and in that way cause her to lose the support of any powers of grace sustaining her. She confronts him with the very soul of chastity--her faithfulness--and it is this

fidelity that he knows he must somehow shift if he is to have her for his own. For him too there can be no double loyalty of the mind. So the real trial becomes the trial of her faith. If she relinquishes this, both of them know that she will be enslaved.

Faith is a faculty of reason first of all, and it is her mind and will that Comus works upon. There is no magic charm he has that can touch her mind and will unless these freely consent to be so touched. Comus needs her mind if he is to have her, and therefore within herself, as Arthos has said so well, "the greater peril is that somehow she may lose her identity, 'The divine property of her first being.'¹⁷ That is why it becomes so necessary "that the Lady's doctrine and her reason itself, her link with Heaven, be most urgently maintained."¹⁸

The Lady herself immediately makes "truth and honesty" the criterion by which she rejects his offered drink. At this point the "ugly-headed Monsters" appear, and her immediate response to their appearance is a plea for Heaven's help in the precise form that grace must take:

¹⁷On "A Mask", 20.

¹⁸Ibid., 21.

mercy. "Mercy guard me!" is the cry she makes, and the reader knows that Jove has sent his guardian helper but that he has seen fit to make the Lady momentarily rely upon her faith and personal resources alone (where mercy no doubt has its special kinds of action on the mind).

The Lady recognizes more and more what Comus is and calls him "foul deceiver" who has "betray'd my credulous innocence." She rejects the "brew'd enchantments" as "lickerish baits fit to ensnare a brute." But her main argument is directed against the evil of his own mind and will: "None/ But such as are good men can give good things" (703). It is the human power of discrimination that she upholds: "that which is not good, is not delicious/ To a well-govern'd and wise appetite" (704-705). In accordance with Platonic doctrine, and Christian, Roman and medieval too, she trusts the power of the mind to discriminate and govern appetite. So she uses her own human resources to combat his arguments. Comus himself is clearly limited to what amounts to human powers of persuasion here, and the trial of her faith proceeds in just such human terms. For her faith is bounded by the human nature whose powers God has renewed in her.

Comus' answer is two steps removed from the truth which the Lady upholds. In the first place, as Lord Monboddo indicates, the Lady is not arguing against true pleasures of appetite but only for their government by the mind: "That is, an appetite in subjection to the rational part, and which is pleased with nothing but what reason approves of"

(Todd IV:139). In attacking her view, Comus seeks to mislead her by misconstruing it. He speaks first of abstinence, suggesting that she is following some of the severer forms of Stoic and Cynic doctrines of austerity, whereas she is really upholding a doctrine common to several Greek and Roman philosophies at least from Plato onward, and as they both must know, Christian doctrine too: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). He continues to misconstrue her meaning intentionally, and never counters her argument of wise government of appetite but only the view which he himself sets up to be knocked down--that those who live on porridge and wear coarse clothes and are in all ways niggardly toward nature "live like Nature's bastards, not her sons."

But Comus further seeks to misdirect the Lady's attention from the true issue confronting her by arguing that nature's plenitude is intended by God himself for the surfeit of the senses and the appetite. To live in a severely frugal way (a way that she herself has not proposed) would mean, he says, that:

Th' all-giver would be unthank't, would be
unprais'd,
Not half his riches known, and yet despis'd,
And we should serve him as a grudging master,
As a penurious niggard of his wealth, (723-726)

He knows that he must somehow convince her that her reasoning and will are against God's own.

To further mislead her from the true issue, he sets

forth the worst kind of epicurean doctrine of satiety:

Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth

.....

But all to please and sate the curious taste?

(710, 714)

Unless men indulge in such satiety, he argues, Nature "would be quite surcharg'd with her own weight,/ And strangl'd with her waste fertility" (728-729). But this does not end his misleading arguments, for it is not what she may use to surfeit but what she may give that he wants--the beauty of herself. And so he argues that "Beauty is nature's coin," and "nature's brag" that must be shared and shown, not enjoyed in itself. The "all-giver" is now nowhere in his sight: her attention must be led to the supposition that nature determines beauty's use, not the God-likeness of one's own faithful mind. Again, he seeks to turn her mind from any thoughts of heaven to an all-sufficient explanation of nature and beauty in themselves. For he hopes to win her to a sense of vanity, to forgetfulness of God and pride in her own beauty.

...coarse complexions

And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply
The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.

What need a vermeil-tinctur'd lip for that,
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the Morn?

(749-753)

He is perfectly clear that his power over her mind is in no way magical but that he must misdirect her thoughts so that she will "be advis'd" by him. It is only by winning her thoughts through false reasoning that he can win her to a false loyalty. And then he hopes that she will drink his "brew'd enchantments," the one thing in the present speech

that he has refrained from speaking of at all and that he most wants. All his arguments are designed to weaken her mind and will to the point where she thinks only of the senses and her body and nature in themselves. Then he will be able to gain her assent to use his darker powers. Until she does, he himself is limited to purely human and rational means of argument. He seeks to disable her mind and will by argument so that she will no longer even recognize the darker issue that confronts her here.

She herself, however, does not forget that darker issue at all. She is conscious that she is in the midst of "magic structures rear'd so high" and that all the rest is nothing but "dear Wit and gay Rhetoric." She shows herself to be "As wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Her first awareness is that she is in the midst of "unhallow'd air," where nature itself is not being viewed with sanctity. She is quite clear as to how he hopes to win her to his darker ends:

...this Juggler
 Would think to charm my judgement, as mine eyes,
 Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.
 (757-759)

And she meets him on the level of the mind. She undermines his reasoning at once. For she says that it is "vice" which she is opposing with the "tongue" of "virtue" and that what must be checked in vice's arguments is "pride." Vice in its pride distorts the truth of being that nature itself upholds. Nature, she says,

Means her provision only to the good

That live according to her sober laws,
 And holy dictate of spare Temperance:
 (765-767)

The good leave vice alone and see in nature's innocence a lawful holiness. It is "Nature's full blessings" that should be "well dispens't/ In unsuperfluous even proportion," (772-773). Not only is Comus' argument for satiety no temptation to her but she sees that it is already "lewdly-pampered Luxury" in the world that keeps "every just man" from his "moderate and beseeming share." The proportioning of nature is for her the way to thank the giver of it all. There is need, she implies, for man to bring to nature a principle of proportioning and selection in loyalty to the Creator's own design. Thus the senses and nature itself are not the crux of Comus' argument for her: the vicious use of these--his own evil nature--is at the bottom of all his reasoning:

...for swinish gluttony
 Ne'er looks to Heav'n amidst his gorgeous feast,
 But with besotted base ingratitude
 Grams, and blasphemes his feeder. (776-779)

It is as if her counter argument is that he reasons from a lie within his soul, as though to reason like him is to be evil and to have no true identity because one has lost one's link with Heaven. The intent and direction of the mind and will are made to count for everything--to look to heaven with gratitude and not blaspheme. To proportion life by reason's light is how to praise the giver of it all.

The Lady's speech to this point forms the penultimate climax of the poem and it is crucial to the meaning of the poem to see what is happening here. The Lady, by the free

act of her own mind, successfully opposes this evil being who by his reasoning would break her mind and will and her identity. She does so partly by the doctrines of philosophy which are trained in the service of her faith, and partly by the Christian doctrines of that faith itself. The philosophy is that of Plato. One central passage appears to be the myth of the soul given in the Phaedrus: of the charioteer, reason, with the noble horse of spirit or emotion allied with reason, and the ignoble horse of passion or sensation that is hard to reign. The other is that of the Philebus, on the distinction between pleasure and the good, and of the good life as a proportioning.¹⁹

But it cannot be argued too convincingly that Plato was the single originating source of such a view. Augustine had given exalted expression to it more than once, and I think that his interpretation accords more with the Lady's

¹⁹Phaedrus, 244-257. Vol. I:248-260. The Phaedrus is unquestionably a major source for the philosophical conceptions of the poem.

Philebus, esp. 21, 38, 40, 51, 52, 55, 61-67. Vol. II: 353, 371, 374, 386, 387, 390, 397-403.

The important study of Plato's influence on Milton is Irene Samuel's Plato and Milton, which, however, deals primarily with the later works. Miss Samuel, as has been mentioned earlier, discounts the influence of Plato on Milton's earlier works, but did not make a special study of this. Arthos in his study of the present poem gives chief emphasis to Plato's influence as well as to the role that magic plays in the poem. His conclusions in his first study of the poem are accurate and just as to the final intention of the poem, but he appears to me to throw the poem's emphases out of proportion in much of his discussion. And in his more recent studies he draws conclusions that I would think leave out of account some of the most important considerations that the poem itself presents.

total outlook upon life, as a single passage from The City of God may serve to indicate.

The whole use, then, of things temporal has a reference to this result of earthly peace in the earthly community, while in the city of God it is connected with eternal peace. And therefore, if we were irrational animals, we should desire nothing beyond the proper arrangement of the parts of the body and the satisfaction of the appetites--nothing, therefore, but bodily comfort and abundance of pleasures, that the peace of the body might contribute to the peace of the soul. For if bodily peace be wanting, a bar is put to the peace even of the irrational soul, since it cannot obtain the gratification of its appetites. And these two together help out the mutual peace of soul and body, the peace of harmonious life and health. For as animals, by shunning pain, show that they love peace of soul, so their shrinking from death is a sufficient indication of their intense love of that peace which binds soul and body in close alliance. But, as man has a rational soul, he subordinates all this which he has in common with the beasts to the peace of his rational soul, that his intellect may have free play and may regulate his actions, and that he may thus enjoy the well-ordered harmony of knowledge and action which constitutes, as we have said, the peace of the rational soul. And for this purpose he must desire to be neither molested by pain, nor disturbed by desire, nor extinguished by death, that he may arrive at some useful knowledge by which he may regulate his life and manners. But, owing to the liability of the human mind to fall into mistakes, this very pursuit of knowledge may be a snare to him unless he has a divine Master, whom he may obey without misgiving, and who may at the same time give him such help as to preserve his own freedom. And because, so long as he is in this mortal body, he is a stranger to God, he walks by faith, not by sight; and he therefore refers all peace, bodily or spiritual or both, to that peace which mortal man has with the immortal God, so that he exhibits the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law.

(XIX. 14. Vol. II:490)

A study of all the possible sources would require a separate work. My own conviction is that they are very modestly employed, in such a way that the focus of attention is on the action of the Lady's mind and on her faith.

The action of the Lady's mind has been so finely set

forth by others that I prefer to use their statements to help define the central issue of the poem:

Comus never does 'touch the freedom of her mind', and it is exactly what he wishes to take possession of, as the whole myth clearly figures. He argues for interior consent--giving this is what would make her his thrall, and it is what the rest of the rabble have given.... Each single step in the Lady's answer shows her 'chaste', and what this chastity keeps inviolate is her freedom, specifically her free and uncharmed judgement.... The Lady's position is the completely Christian one (she takes one, not two): that Comus does not fully describe 'nature' and 'man's nature'. She acts according to another allegiance, and what she has that he cannot shake is fidelity. (Tuve, 140-141)

The faith that moves the Lady is the faith to which her reason leads her. She accepts no distraction, but follows her thought innocently and wholly. Doing so, she grows stronger than the enemy the world opposed her with one day, by chance, isolating her, threatening her. The truth she followed was equal to the trial, and in herself, as in the universe, she knew that she would find the means to survive and to rout the enemy--in herself and by Jove's grace. (Arthos, On "A Mask", 50)

The Lady has the mind of faith. And it is Christian faith that most controls her thought. Her language throughout the poem is filled with images of holiness as well as with repeated references to her mindfulness of heaven and dependence on a higher power. She in her thoughts is consistent with the action of the poem, which from the first line brings into play the action of higher powers to aid the self which within its own mind is sustained by acts of faith. The underlying concepts of the poem appear to be most clearly faith and grace at work throughout creation now. This is a Christian concept of the renewal of beginning "bliss". I believe that we find the central sources for the poem's thought to be directly Christian ones.

For the Lady at this point in the poem I believe that the controlling source is that of James, although the same conceptions can be found in the letters of Paul:

Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

.....

But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.
(1:12-18, 25)

To these convictions expressed by James must be added Paul's strong consciousness of evil powers at work opposed to God, and perhaps (as Todd has noted that Milton himself was to refer to later) Paul's statement that "the body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor. 6:13).

It is at such a height of personal conviction that the poem's climax comes. It is the Lady's moment of virtual triumph, for in effect she dismisses Comus from her mind as a power with whom there is nothing left to argue about at all. There is, she says in effect, no sound reason left in him for her mind to reason with, and this is the direst form that disdain can take. He is simply no longer worth her bothering with. If there were any possibility that it would

alter his "profane tongue" with its "contemptuous words," she would "something say, yet to what end?" For he has "nor Ear nor Soul to apprehend." He is worthless in her sight as well as in God's. And in his present condition he has his just due.

And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
More happiness than this thy present lot.

.....
Thou art not fit to hear thyself convince't;
(788-789, 792)

She acts toward him as Christ himself once said: "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you" (Matt. 7:6). To all that he might argue now she is impervious, and he beneath the level of her care. And if she should be pressed to care enough to move further in the opposition of her mind to him,

...the uncontrolled worth
Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and
shake,
Till all thy magic structures rear'd so high,
Were shatter'd into heaps o'er thy false head.
(793-799)

What she does is to portend that the wrath of God can move through her to destroy him and that if needed all creation will cooperate toward this end. This is the "mind of Christ" that knows that all the help that faith may ever need is right at hand. And in the comeliness of her mind the Lady, like Christ himself, does not call forth such powers but is content to point to Comus' portentous end.

The power of her words is felt by Comus, and he under-

stands where this power comes from:

She fables not, I feel that I do fear
 Her words set off by some superior power;
 And though not mortal, yet a cold shudd'ring dew
 Dips me all o'er, as when the wrath of Jove
 Speaks thunder, and the chains of Erebus
 To some of Saturn's crew. (800-805)

He knows that what moves through her has more than mortal force and power to overthrow him if she should call on such power, which even now is close enough for him to feel.

"The chains of Erebus" is that to which he likens the "cold shuddering dew" that comes over him. Those chains bound the rebellious gods whom Jove overthrew, and Comus feels an influence like the wrath of Jove itself. For that is the power behind the Lady's innocence. And that is why all his magic arts cannot stand against the force of truth in her own mind--because that truth has the power and, if needed, the wrath of God behind it. The marvel of this truth is not that of magic but of grace. It depends upon a correspondence of her being and intention with God's own.

Here again the fundamental conception is a Christian one: that the wrath of God is directed against those who suppress the truth and that this wrath takes the form at the present time of forsaking them and leaving them to their own abominations, as the Lady herself acts toward Comus through her mind. Paul states the doctrine in the form decisive for this poem:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his

invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. (Rom. 1:18-25)

It is only because they have been graced with a beginning "bliss" that men of faith escape this fate; and those like Comus, who are "more than mortal" in their choice, have no escape (See Ephesians 2:1-10). Such is the Christian doctrine on which this portion of the poem depends.

Comus, though he trembles, does not change. His last argument is medical: "the lees/ And settlings of a melancholy blood" have dispirited her, and should she drink, her "drooping spirit" will have delight "Beyond the bliss of dreams." He would now make his potion that of a physician to her body and soul. But he still must plead: "Be wise, and taste." Temptation and not force is the only weapon that he has against her mind. Her body is held fast but her mind is free. It must be noted that neither the Lady nor Jove chooses to free her through some miracle of her own chastity. The real "miracle" of the masque is the freedom of the mind to resist enslavement in spite of the subjection of the senses and the body; part of this "miracle" is the harmony of her life with so much beyond her life that

responds to her need. It is as though countless created natures are engaged in gracing her.

And it is at this point that help comes. The brothers come in first (most human in their help, even to the extent of giving faulty aid), break Comus' glass and after a struggle put his followers to flight. Haemony has given them protection against his power to charm and chain their bodies and senses, so that they by their own skill in weaponry are able to drive off his disorderly crew. It is then that the attendant Spirit comes in, as much as to say that they too have a strength of their own that needed to be tested. But now the rod is seen to be an effectual magic instrument, for without reversing the rod at the same time that the "backward mutters of dissevering power" are made, they "cannot free the Lady that sits here/ In stony fetters fixt, and motionless" (818-819). Without the rod which the brothers forgot to seize, even the attendant Spirit is powerless to free her. He too, in spite of his celestial origin, has limited powers, and this is in keeping not only with his having taken on a human likeness but also with the distinction of his native element from that in which the Lady has been "fixt". As Warton has said, "something, and something preternatural...was necessary for the present distress" (Todd, IV:150). So the Nymph Sabrina is called forth, the fitting figure to give the Lady aid; and this too underscores the proportioned interlinking of the numerous but bounded powers of good.

It is absorbing to see how smoothly Sabrina's own

history is incorporated into a poem where all the interest centers on the safety of a single girl. For Sabrina did not get off as easily as the Lady does, and yet there is no sadness in the narrative about her life. The reason is that she continues to live, as a being with a most appealing charm. Herself a king's daughter, in fleeing from her enraged stepmother she "Commended her fair innocence to the flood" (831). But death (for those who would not allow death to become a cause for them to turn back on their faith) could not conceivably end the life of "a Virgin pure," noble and innocent. Mercy met her in the very place in which she drowned. Water Nymphs who "play'd" at the bottom of the river "Held up their pearled wrists and took her in" (833). Nereus, the oldest child of Ocean and himself the "ancient one of the sea," treated her with "Ambrosial Oils" until she "underwent a quick immortal change" and became "Goddess of the River." As kind as Nereus and the Nereids, Sabrina keeps her "maid'n gentleness," "visits the herds," "helping" and "with precious vial'd liquors heals."

As Warton said in response to Johnson's objection to the figure of Sabrina, "by the poetical reader, this fiction is considered as true." (Todd, IV:150). The whole conception is derived from folklore, as found in Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess. And as Hughes notes, Sabrina "was also a favourite figure in local Welsh tradition" (Minor Poems, 260). Her whole history has the simple grace of folklore and its force of truth. Her introduction into the poem helps the

reader realize that Milton's conception of chastity and faith and grace was no novelty, however much more thoroughgoing and pure his conceptions may have been than those of some who wrote in the same tradition. He obviously wrote in a tradition that was all but incurable in its conviction of God's grace and of the value to be placed on innocence. To suggest that the Lady "had" to be saved would be to miss a portion of the poem's power. She had to be saved only because the poem deals with the present possibilities of earthly life. Of course the affirmation of the clarity and strength of innocence required that she should never succumb to Comus' wiles. But the introduction of Sabrina makes it quite clear that the poem is written in the kind of affirmative spirit for which death itself would be no final tragedy. Those who had helped to shape the tradition in which Milton wrote had long ago acquired the sturdiness of faith to believe that an innocent death was not the death of innocence. Strangely enough, as the story of Sabrina shows, such deaths were added to the prevailing powers of grace.

It is this river Nymph who has the local power to break "The clasping charm and thaw the numbing spell" (853). But to gain her aid she must be "right invok't," and this invocation must be made "in warbled Song." The attendant Spirit's lovely song is indeed an invocation, not only to Sabrina but also in the name of all those water spirits with whom she could be expected to be linked. And the force of it all is a petition that she "listen and save." She is to come in the name of all that invisibly supports that little

portion of creation over which she reigns in "maid'n gentleness" and healing aid. And she does come in answer to the invocation, in order to meet a mortal need with which she could be expected specially to sympathize.

Her appearance is as fleeting as it is effectual. She comes specifically as a local deity, as though she is the opposite of Comus, with powers to bless the physical nature upon which he has worked his harm. She is visible, and yet when she walks over the "Cowslip's velvet head" it "bends not as I tread." Her counter charm to that of Comus is physical: partly "Drops that from my fountain pure/ I have kept of precious cure" (912-913); and partly her own "chaste palms moist and cold." The charms are, I think, intended to be entirely magical. The use of drops of water is in keeping with her native environment and does not require the suggestion of baptism to be meaningful. After all, such a Lady as Sabrina comes to help would have been baptized effectually long before. The efficacy of her help is the same as Comus' evil influence, preternatural, and Milton carefully restricts the use of magic here to this dimension of reality, as if to say again that there is no magic spell beyond the senses and the body they affect.

As Sabrina departs the attendant Spirit expresses his gratitude for her help in a delightful prayer that she and her river and the life of nature surrounding it may be specially blessed. This is in direct contrast to his attitude toward Comus, who had just been referred to as the "unblest enchanter vile." Furthermore, where Comus

tended to force everything into servility to Chaos, the blessings which the attendant Spirit prays for on behalf of Sabrina and the local fields and streams and woods around her are such as would free nature from the extremes of flood and drought so that the things of nature can show forth their loveliness. Sabrina's virginity is not associated with the bleakness of the earth but with "Groves of myrrh, and cinnamon," whole groves of rather special gifts. She herself is again referred to as "Virgin, daughter of Locrine/ Sprung of old Anchises' line" (922-923), as if to emphasize the close association of human nature to so much within nature itself that may have a hidden power to bless.

Up to this point in the poem the attendant Spirit has been a guardian and invoker of aid. Now he acts for the first time as a "faithful guide" from this "cursed place" to "holier ground." Up to now he has acted, as Jove intended him to act, "for their defence, and guard." Up to now the gracing powers which had given their help had been either powers of the mortals themselves or powers closely associated with an earthly environment. It is only now that the human characters are dealt with almost directly by Heaven's "grace," except for what took place within their minds. The word lends in the clause "while Heaven lends us grace," underscores a truth that has applied to the whole poem: that not even innocence has yet been able to be perfectly free and that, quietly, and through the created nature and beings he has made, Jove has directed all things

to work toward some good end, each with its bounded power to give aid.

But now the limited trial in the woods is past, so that, presumably still "by quick command from Severan Jove," the attendant Spirit says that "I shall be your faithful guide" (944). It is not clear that Jove decreed the trial of the Lady's and her brothers' strength. But it is evident that the active intervention of both human and spiritual help limited the extent of the trial and that a being from the celestial realm (still in a human likeness) is now given power to bring them safely through the tangled mazes of this woods. They are to be led to an environment where virtue and good are more directly powerful, a place where there is a "home-felt" sense of grace on earth--their home, their "Father's residence." "Blest Providence" has squared the Lady's trial to her "proportion'd strength." And she in her virtue and her chastity is not led to some nunnery but home--a place that in its human dimension appears as blessed as that in which Sabrina dwells. For it is a place of innocent delights, made more so by their coming there:

All the Swains that there abide,
With Jigs and rural dance resort.
We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and cheer;
(951-955)

In the dances the rural and the courtly are given their turn to express their true delights, in direct contrast to Comus' disorderly crew and his dissembling courtliness.

The attendant Spirit's "second Song" sets forth the

meaning of the poem explicitly. Again, Milton provides the best commentary on all the thought and action that has taken place. The Lady and her brothers are brought before the "Lord and Lady bright" as a "new delight." They are "Three fair branches of your own" (969). Perhaps this is an allusion to the unity and individuality of those who have been engrafted by heaven's choice onto some even more special vine of life. For it is now made explicit that "Heav'n" has permitted this trial to take place and that the three of them together have been tried. Specifically what has been tried is

...their youth,
 Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
(970-971)

Nearly everything needed to understand the poem is given in those four words. "Youth" suggests development, an ongoing character to the individual's life that in some stages needs to be tried out. Faith is the mind's own strength that links it with heaven's power and to all those powers throughout creation that work for heaven's good. Patience suggests the resolution to stand firm by the conviction that behind the self's own strength whatever gracing powers are needed will be forthcoming if one's faith holds firm. And truth is that conviction by which the self can reason out its faith to make it firm and clear enough to act within creation by reason's light. There is no pretense that this trial was anything but "hard assays." But what it leads to is "a crown of deathless Praise,"--and the suggestion is that this limited victory has an eternal significance for

their lives. But their triumph has immediate consequences, for they are able to act truly here and now in exact opposition to the way in which Comus and his crew had acted so falsely. They are able to enact a "victorious dance" over "sensual Folly, and Intemperance." It is the heaven-graced dance of life that they can engage in now, and do.

"The dances ended," the attendant Spirit immediately speaks of his own home. What it proves to be is a place of even more "home-felt" delights than the Lady's and her family's temporal home. The scenes that he describes are those of peopled and of landscaped loveliness, "Up in the broad fields of the sky" (979). In some way or other it is, perhaps, a purer earth, as B. A. Wright and Arthos both reason.²⁰ It is certainly a place where pure beings should dwell, like earth but even lovelier. Those who are familiar with Plato's Phaedo will remember Socrates' description of the true earth, as quoted earlier: "pure and situated in the pure heaven." It is well to remember that Socrates only believed that "something of the kind is true," so that Milton was at liberty to sketch particulars without the need to make details unreasonably precise.

I believe that the reader is meant to understand, however, that it is the heavens and the home of gods that is

²⁰Wright, Times Literary Supplement, October 27, 1945, p. 511. Arthos, On "A Mask", 38. See his note (22), p. 66 for references to the Wright-Lewis discussion of the location of the Gardens of Hesperus. My own view is that Milton was designedly imprecise and that we should seek his reasons for being so instead of trying to make his cosmology square so closely with some earlier ones.

being described. There are only three locations which the attendant Spirit refers to in his epilogue, other than the earth that mortals know, and he is most selective in his references to the beings who dwell there. Only the first is described with exquisite attention to its earth-like details. It contains the Gardens of Hesperus, himself a god, the brother of the Titan Atlas who held up the heavens. The Graces, who together with the Hours are said to bring their "bounties" to this place, are themselves children of Zeus and Eurynome, the Titan Ocean's daughters. They are true graces--Splendor and Mirth and Good Cheer. In this place it is fittingly Adonis, who had been killed by the mad boar he hunted, who is found, "Waxing well of his deep wound/ In slumber soft" (1000-01). And nearby him, "on the ground/ Sadly sits th' Assyrian Queen" (1001-02). For whatever reason, the suggestion is given that even in this lovely place Venus is not yet given the fulfillment of the love that she has for Adonis, nor is he himself quite well as yet. There is a strong suggestion of futurity.

And in the realm above these "broad fields of the sky," although there is satisfaction among those who dwell there, the attention is again directed to some future, soon to be begotten bliss. For "far above in spangle@ sheen" it is "Celestial Cupid," Venus' son, who is seen holding "his dear Psyche sweet intranc't." In other words, first we are given the goddess of love and beauty herself, still sadly sitting near her once mortal lover who is now immortalized and

"waxing well." Then, far above them in a realm that Venus no doubt can visit too as home, is seen Cupid, love himself, and his once mortal lover, Psyche, who was made immortal to become his bride. It is from them that Milton says:

Two blissful twins are to be born,
Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn.
(1010-11)

Rich as these celestial dwellings are already, the reader is given the sense of a still more wonderful impending "bliss" to come--the birth of Youth and Joy.

I think that these references to gods and mortals wedded in their love are as important to the meaning of the epilogue as the allusions to philosophy.²¹ For what is being spoken of are those things which are more than all philosophies--that state of bliss which men can only wonder at, not yet quite know. Fittingly, it is the attendant Spirit,

²¹ This is a point where it is well to remember what Hanford reminded us of some time ago--that "the poets are his guides and tutors" too ("Youth," 110). Arthos' most recent note on the epilogue (1961) again suggests that the demands which he makes on the poem for philosophical coherence are different than those which Milton intended to be made. Why, for instance, suggest the need to allegorize the mythological references? Why not Venus and Adonis, Cupid and Psyche just as the listener who knew the myths would think of them and of the realms described? Not allegory but the simple power that mythological figures in themselves may have is called upon. We are being shown earth and its bounded powers translated to eternity. Grace, not philosophy first of all, makes such a view cohere. For these are realms of impending glory that the attendant Spirit describes. And those who are faithful in their virtue, which the gracing power of God makes possible, are favored to go higher than any earthly comparisons that we can make--to God himself perhaps, whose realm no one, not even the attendant spirit, can describe.

speaking in his own person now, who invites the attention of the reader to the realities and expectations of a life beyond the present earth. As far as I know, the "blissful twins" still to be born are not derived from classical mythology. Therefore the reader is led to remember that eternal youth and joy have been promised by a Christian God. Milton's poem On Time (ll. 11-18) reminds us that such thoughts had come into his mind before. Jesus' own repeated promises of a kingdom of God to come led the minds of Christians back to such great passages as that of Isaiah in which the prophecy was made that:

A highway shall be there,
 and it shall be called the Holy Way;
 the unclean shall not pass over it,
 and fools shall not err therein.

 but the redeemed shall walk there.
 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
 and come to Zion with singing,
 with everlasting joy upon their heads;
 they shall obtain joy and gladness,
 and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
 (Is. 35:8-10)

Revelation also spoke of the coming kingdom as a place where God "will dwell with them, and they shall be his people...he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.... And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new.... He who conquers shall have this heritage" (Rev. 21:3-5, 7). The epilogue, along with other portions of the poem, appears to allude to chapter 22 of Revelation, which describes the "tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit" and the dwelling place of those about the throne of God. We are told that "God...has sent his angel to show his

servants what must soon take place." Those who do God's commandments are said to be "blessed" and to "have the right to the tree of life," whereas "everyone who loves and practices falsehood" remains outside.

Although Milton's vision of heaven appears to have been richer and bolder than that of other Puritans, he was one with them in cherishing such thoughts. Wakefield says of the Puritans that "the joy of Heaven was often to be meditated here below. This was at once the preparation for its future blessedness and the impulse to a heavenly life upon earth.... To all the Puritans, heaven was earth perfected.... The excellencies are as those of this life in all its aspects, only so much more!" (152)

But before relating the life of mortals to the higher life to come, the attendant Spirit takes delight in telling of the liberty of such celestial life which he himself partakes of.

I can fly, or I can run
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bow'd welkin slow doth bend,
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the Moon. (1012-17)

He has already alerted us to our relation to such life by his parenthetical prompting to:

(List mortals, if your ears be true)
(997)

Now he openly proclaims how to "follow me."

Mortals that would follow me,
Love virtue, she alone is free,
(1018-19)

Liberty comes not from living like Comus but from living a

life devoted to the good. That, the attendant Spirit says, is the way to all the joy of which he speaks. In fact, for mortals there will be more joy. For it is now that he speaks of the third and highest location of life beyond this earthly life. Virtue

can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the Sphery chime;
(1020-21)

There is only one place higher than the spheres with their celestial harmony, and that is in the home of God himself. And so it is that with such a destiny,

if Virtue feeble were,
Heav'n itself would stoop to her.
(1022-23)

Bush has written that "we cannot open Milton without an access of both strength and humility, a feeling that we are greater, and weaker, than we know."²² That is the sense which these closing lines convey to me, and more. Much of the meaning of the closing passage is enhanced by a recollection of the poem On Time. Line 19 in that poem--"When once our heavenly-guided soul shall climb"--rather helpfully suggests the relation that heaven may have to virtue in the present poem as well. Also, the indication in the earlier poem that the actual "climb" is to come coincides with the element of futurity that appears to affect the inhabitants of the heavenly realms themselves in the present poem--contentment there now, but more joy and vitality to come.

²²English Literature, 398.

For as Arthos has said so well, the epilogue "concludes with the nearly explicit statement that Jove is a merciful god. The Spirit's words are thus a benediction."²³

The thought of the concluding line goes beyond any of the intermediary helps that have been given to mortals in the poem. It unites the poem's action with that encompassing truth which Christians believe to have been brought about by Christ. Todd's quotation from "the late Earl of Bridgewater, Mr. Egerton," is not inapt. The poet, he says, ended his poem with an allusion to "that stupendous Mystery, whereby He, the lofty theme of *Paradise Regained*, stooping from above all height 'bowed the Heavens, and came down' on Earth, to atone as Man for the Sins of Men, to strengthen feeble Virtue by the influence of his Grace, and to teach Her to ascend his throne" (Todd, IV:175). To see this stated so baldly suggests the main artistic challenge that Milton faced in writing the masque: the challenge to brighten and not to dull the truth he saw. This is the problem of the communication of religious insight, of what has made an impact like that of revelation on the mind. Cragg, in speaking of this problem, writes in a way that helps us get close to the center of the significance of Milton's poem: "How can you explain what happens when the life of God is disclosed within the limits of our life? We have only one resource; we can suggest its meaning as we are able, and

²³On "A Mask", 24.

then affirm that our human life can ascend to the divine because God has descended and drawn us to Himself."²⁴

The poem, however, makes the point with the utmost modesty, inasmuch as it is the individual's fidelity to the truth of his own faith that is at issue here. It is a poem not of Christ's work but of its consequences in the life of faith. And as a work that deals with faith throughout, it depends upon a conception of creation as a realm of grace. That is one of the chief splendors of the poem: that earth itself and all the intermediary realms between God's heaven and earth are looked upon as filled with powers, bounded by their created nature, but each fraught with the ability to aid. Perhaps the major triumph of the poem is the moving awareness it gives that each created being is free to act for good within itself and freely can give aid to those in need. It is heaven's grace that makes such freedom and such faith a present possibility. That is why virtue is called free, because she alone is free to act in accordance with a universally intended harmony: God's loving vigilance must be matched by man's fidelity. In mortals it is mindfulness of the relation of the whole creation to heaven itself that sustains such faith. The poem becomes an affirmation of re-effected harmony, and the individual is considered to be strong within himself when he lives by the truth of this

²⁴ Puritanism, 52. See also Grierson, Milton and Wordsworth, 1-25, and Curry, Milton's Ontology, 13.

faith.

The life of virtue is the life of faith, for such a life is fidelity to the God who loved creation enough to renew its manifold powers for good. Chastity is shown to be fidelity in action, the delightful form of re-established innocence. And so perhaps the poem's final suggestion is that men should give themselves to God because he has given himself, on every hand, at every turn, to them. Or perhaps, since the emphasis is on the individual, the poem means to say that there is a holy humility to the truth the mind can know, so much so that to realize the independent integrity of all created beings will, because of gratitude for so much that gives aid, make the individual want to maintain his integrity and character in a life of holiness that fulfills within himself what so much help makes possible. This faith in oneself and in everything that has been made rests on the willingness of heaven itself to stoop if there is need (not just to act through powers which it has created for harmony), and on the hope that the love that can be known already in the whole creation is to be fulfilled. So, with the modesty that belongs to chastity itself, the poem depends on the conviction which Paul has expressed:

Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.
(Phil. 3:17-21)

As can be seen, the poem contains "an integration of innumerable attitudes and insights."²⁵ But all of these tend toward one end, the affirmation that the individual can see the way to make the mind's own faith become a power by which one can live, secure against evil, delighting in the good. The single coherent view of heaven and the whole creation which the poem gives is that of a graced realm called forth into effectual power by the simple acts of an individual's continuing faith. To this view of the acts and aspirations of unswerving faithfulness, all the other elements of the poem's thought are subordinated. Hughes' comment is most justified when he says that "in *Comus* Milton's Puritanism is one with his Platonism."²⁶ In line with this, it is not only to the poem's artifice but also to its elements of Platonic thought that I would apply Arthos' helpful explanation as to why a Christian poem should utilize so many non-Christian resources: "And though the poem is Christian, the gods bear pagan names, not to obscure the meaning or provide a bridge for allegory, but because ancient artifice that bears the force of truth gains strength and authority from its strangeness."²⁷ It seems to me, however, that the

²⁵On "A Mask", 17.

²⁶Minor Poems, xlv.

²⁷On "A Mask", 24.

poem, in presenting Christian truth by such fresh means, is intended to make us think directly of that truth. I believe that the philosophical references, although necessary, are not the fundamental ones required to explicate the poem's thought. The meaning of the poem appears to depend first of all upon such Biblical references as I have cited (and no doubt many more), and I would think that Milton depended on his readers' familiarity with them.

To me the interpretation of the poem becomes unjustifiably confused if we fail to see the force of some of what Miss Tuve has said: "It seems even more necessary and wise to call attention...to the impossibility of watching 'pagan' and 'Christian' suggestions and meanings separately at work in such traditional symbols. 'There is little that is Christian about Comus', says Saurat; one must respond that 'there is the central figure and device'" (135-136). And while I do not agree with her that the poem requires an allegorical interpretation, she makes the vital point most convincingly as to why we must consider the "pagan" thought and imagery to have been put to a specifically Christian use. The phrases that she quotes are those from Brooks and Hardy's edition of the poems.

Hence we must observe that these 'classical' figures, in becoming metaphors (the nature of allegory) have taken on an additional way of being true, and that their new reference is to a Christian understanding--not of behavior but of the metaphysical structure that determines the meaning of actions. This is a point about both poetics and history. Phrases like 'the conflict of pagan and Christian ideas in the poem', 'intrusion of a Christian theme into a pagan context', 'the shock of the sudden juxtaposition', are historical observations, but insufficiently accurate as history.

Christianity had long ago planted the flag of its sovereignty within the mind of 'Ulysses'. (139)

For Christians, all history is looked upon as supporting or opposing what God did in Christ. It is from the consequences of this redeeming act that grace, prevenient within the whole creation or bestowed upon a person specially, is seen to be a present power supporting and renewing life.²⁸ In the poem Milton commits himself to this belief that God is re-creatively at work within the universe and that the Lady's life is under Christ's regenerating power. This is a daring extension of the "recapitulation" theory of Christ's work--that by his acts he has begun to reconstitute creation as a form of structured grace, whose reality and influence is known only by those who live with eyes of faith. From the first line the poem affirms that God takes cognizance of those who are mindful of their relationship to heaven and who continue to look to the heavenly vision of earthly possibilities of grace for their insight and their strength. He, by his appointed agents or directly if this should prove necessary, acts to intervene and protect them in their difficulties, so far as they enable him to do so by remaining faithful to the heavenly vision and the character of virtue thus far formed in them. God and his sustaining powers work together with the freedom of the individual's faith, so that it is the individual's freely sustained mindfulness that calls forth both the mind's own graced strength and all

²⁸ See Appendix A for a discussion of the Christian concept of grace.

the necessary aids God brings. Such a graced character is established and strengthened in its faith by undergoing trials commensurate with its development.

The one conviction that controls the poem's thought and imagery and language from the first line to the last is the holiness of life, the love of heaven for earth and earth for heaven. The poem affirms that the individual who follows such a way of life discovers in every area of life countless powers working for good, each free to act according to its nature yet bounded by that nature too, even as the self is free to act yet bounded by its faith. And the poem affirms that over all is heaven's sustaining grace, so that the individual who lives faithfully is guided by God's wisdom, which becomes the truth of the faith by which he lives. And, finally, this life is blessed with present strength and joy and looks forward to an eternal life of joy to come.

Thus, while the poem's setting and figures have the force of novelty, the tone that the poem conveys--its holiness and mindfulness of heaven--reminds us that the novelty is not intended to make us set aside the Christian sources of the poem but strengthen them. Among these sources, the controlling thought seems clearly to be that of Paul: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). This conviction is amplified by Paul in many places, perhaps most helpfully for the interpretation of this poem in such passages as the following

from 2 Corinthians:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.... So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

Our mouth is open to you...our heart is wide. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return--I speak as to children--widen your hearts also.

Do not be mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will live in them and move among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you,
and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God. (3:17-18; 5:6-10; 6:14-7:1)

However, Milton's thought is not limited to that of Paul.

In conveying such a rich sense of the graced quality of life, Milton looks back with other Christians to the Psalmists and to Isaiah:

"Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

.....

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and return not thither but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

"For you shall go out in joy,
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their
hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign which shall not be
cut off." (Is. 55:6, 10-13)

It is those who are mindful of the Lord who know the force
such promises have for their own lives. And it is to such
words as those which John attributes to Christ that the
poem, in its modest way, is perhaps intended to return us:

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask
whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.
By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much
fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the
Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in
my love. If you keep my commandments, you will
abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's
commandments and abide in his love. These things
I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and
that your joy may be full. (John 15:7-11)

For it is the joy and innocence of such fidelity to such a
love that the poem most forcefully affirms.

CHAPTER TEN

THE FINAL CHALLENGE: LYCIDAS

Milton's Familiarium Epistolarum Number 7 is one of the superb familiar letters of the world and reveals the good humor, warmth of spirit and fervor of thought which characterized Milton in his spontaneous expression toward his closest friend, Charles Diodati. It has the youthful buoyancy that we associate with the letters of John Keats, except that it is pitched in a somewhat higher key than those of Keats.

The letter was quoted on pages 45-47 of this paper, in the discussion of the subject of friendship in Milton's early works. The letter demonstrates how personal and lively the concept of virtue was to Milton. It is that quality which endeared his friends to him, and his expansive interpretation of what true virtue is like helps us understand the quality of thinking that he brought to such a term when he wrote A Mask a few years earlier and Lycidas just two months later than the letter itself. True friendship is fostered, he wrote to Diodati, by "viva invicem virtutum recordatione," "a loving recollection of virtues on both sides." Milton then adds one of those rare passages in literature in which virtue and beauty and truth are all conjoined and particularized most generously, not only in terms of personal dedication but in terms of loyalty

to friends who manifest these qualities in their own characters. Day and night, he says, he is led to follow "vestigis," "traces" of the idea of the beautiful which he can recognize. And if he should fail to gain such wisdom himself, he says, "qui eam gloriam assecuti sunt, aut eo feliciter aspirant, illos semper colam, & suspiciam," "I should always worship and look up to those who have attained that glory, or happily aspire to it...." The letter makes it plain that what he is most deeply attracted to is virtue and beauty and truth in human character, and that his loyalty extends to those who may do no more than aspire to express such qualities. These convictions are so passionately expressed in this personal letter that it should be clear that as a poet Milton could readily invest a poetic character with such qualities. It is well to remember this in reading Lycidas.

Milton then confides rather winsomely to Diodati his own poetic aspirations:

Audi, Theodote, verum in aurem ut ne rubeam, &
 sinito paulisper apud te grandia loquar; quid
 cogitem quaeris? ita me bonus Deus, immortalitatem.
 Quid agam vero? pterhophuo, & volare meditor: sed
 tenellis admodum adhuc pennis evehit se noster
 Pegasus, humile sapiamus.

Hearken, Theodotus, but let it be in your private
 ear, lest I blush; and allow me for a little to
 use big language with you. You ask what I am
 thinking of? So may the good Deity help me, of
 immortality! And what am I doing? Growing my
 wings and meditating flight; but as yet our
 Pegasus raises himself on very tender pinions.
 Let us be lowly wise! (CE XII:26-27)

There is here both a sense of daring, which no doubt any poet needs in order to go on at all, and a very real humility. It is interesting to compare this passage to Milton's references to poetic immortality in the "Letter to a Friend" (CE XII:324), Ad Patrem (ll. 93-110, 115-120), and Manso (ll. 94-100).¹ Although each of these passages has a different tone, what is common to all of them is the conviction that accomplishments in learning or poetry gain their value by their relationship to virtue and faith and a love of God. This is a conviction which Lycidas also affirmed.

The challenge which Milton had confronted in A Mask was the "chance" trial of an individual's faithfulness by some intruding evil power. In Lycidas the challenge is not some evil influence that would subdue but death itself that just by seeming chance appears to have the power to destroy. What if chaos allows no trial at all but "slits the thin-spun life" as if by accident? That is what happened, and that is what moved the author of Lycidas to write. In the poem the individual dedicated to a life of affirming and inspiring others to affirm fresh possibilities of harmony faces the worst challenge to such a dedicated life--that annihilation and not harmony may occur at any moment of any person's life. The poem is about the best that men can know and be and do and the worst that can and does happen to

¹ Cf. Seventh Prolusion (CE XII:246-249), Elegia Sexta (ll. 49-86), and Ad Patrem (ll. 6-40).

them. Milton had thought about such things before, carefully in the Seventh Prolusion. But when you have been inspired by your work to such an exaltation of dedicated life as is represented by A Mask, and when someone you know is unexpectedly cut off from life, there is a difference to the thoughts you are apt to think. The poet clearly treats his subject with a fresh intensity.

The poem begins with a remarkable implied comparison of the crushing force of death and the poet's sudden need to crush the fruit of song while it is still unripe and therefore as bitter as the constraint that compels him. As Bailey says, "the modesty...is astonishing" (128), but the force of the opening lines comes from their exquisite identity with the poem's theme. It is bitter to the depths of any poet's being that this fact of sudden death is what with terrible irony so often forces the individual on earth to "renew that Song" which Milton in At a Solemn Music longed to hear.

For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,

 Who would not sing...? (8, 10)

It is a broken human relationship that has occurred, and who that is capable would fail to sing of that. Lycidas himself had sung and built "the lofty rhyme"--not the gay elegy but the dedicated song of those whom the Elegia Sexta had described so well. The Lycidas of the poem is one of those who aspired to waken men to an awareness of the highest kind of harmony, and it is this Lycidas who moves

the poet in the poem to his own bittersweet song.² The poem is about one kind of song and it is one aspiring singer of such harmony whose loss is mourned. Of all its excellences perhaps the greatest is the poem's unity. The poem itself makes this amply evident, and in addition it coincides with Milton's concept of the holiness of inspiration which was repeatedly made evident from the Nativity Ode and the Elegia Sexta onward. If in the present poem the Muse is limited, that is not because of any contrast with a heavenly originating power but because, like all else in creation, such inspiration is bounded in its power.

Lycidas' own life was a relationship with such harmony and with all those who shared its benefits with him. Until recently, readers of Lycidas have had their attention widely misdirected by those who seem to forget that a pastoral poet deals neither with abstractions nor with personalities. Although I have not seen his name mentioned in recent criticism, it is John Bailey who took considerable care to make this point most clear. And his conclusion as to who is the real subject of the poem is, in its encompassing way, quite accurate:

Moreover, the poet's real subject is...the death of all who have been or will be loved in all the world, and the sorrow of all the survivors, the tragic destiny of youth and hope and fame, the doom of frailty and transience which has been eternally pronounced on

² Abrams rather decisively reminds us that the poem is first of all about "a nameless shepherd...hymning the death of a fellow poet-pastor...specifically, Lycidas" (222).

so many of the fairest gifts of Nature and all
the noblest works of man. (125)³

It is the death of those who live by faith in harmony and who know both the origin and the rich relationships in which such harmony results.

The unity upon which a comprehension of the poem depends is suggested as clearly as anywhere in the lines "Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,/ That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring" (15-16). Although the "Sisters" may be somewhat different than those of At a Solemn Music, they have the same origin and bounded character, and it is as "pledges of Heav'n's joy" that they are called upon in such strange circumstances. It is the dead singer's and the living one's relation to such "Sisters" and to what they are pledges of that gives the fact of the singer's broken personal relationship such poignancy. For the two singers that the poem talks about shared a personal dedication to the harmony of all that is. The living singer sings of the dead one with the belief that he too may have a singer should he die. What is being expressed is the conviction that such dedicated lives are not isolated instances but that there is a living continuity in the dedication that men make to the highest kind of harmony.

In the Seventh Prologue Milton had permitted Ignorance to make the argument that all that is temporal might soon

³For a fine restatement of this, see Tuve, 93.
Cf. Beum, 328.

end in death, so that temporal praise would be of small consequence to anyone. This was a different prospect than the accidental death of an individual, but it is interesting to see that in lines 19 to 24 in Lycidas the concern that Ignorance had been allowed to express for human praise is quite transformed. The poet's attitude toward Lycidas makes it quite clear that in these lines he is not talking about accomplishments but mere intents, the direction in which a life aspires. The dedication of the singers who accompany or follow one another is seen to be so personal that their relationship is endeared in spite of how much they may or may not have an opportunity to fulfill. What the poet in the first person here hopes for is not praise at all but the recognition that is made by prayer:

So may some gentle Muse
 With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,
 And as he passes turn,
 And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.
(19-24)

It is the recognition given by those who love.⁴

What he goes on to speak about is the shared satisfactions of lives that enjoy a common dedication, of those who were trained together for some memorable work and who found the training period itself a delightful one. In utilizing such memories, Milton draws upon a universal experience of mankind, for men almost invariably look back upon their periods of preparation in a happy kind of light.

⁴Cf. Tuve, 101.

This universal memory of the peace and joy and innocence of younger days is heightened by the pastoral imagery. It is, in fact, at this point that the poem is seen to be clearly pastoral and that the pastoral form is made to give insight into the meaning of the poem. For these two singers in their earlier relationship were "nurst," and they in turn then "fed" the "flock." They did not merely sing or learn to sing. They were being fed and themselves built up, so that by the arts in which they were being trained they too could feed:

For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.
(23-24)

These two early lines make it clear that for Milton all kinds of shepherds have one function first of all--to feed.

In doing so they shared "home-felt" delights. And among the greatest of these, when their flocks were batten-
tened "with the fresh dews of night," was the innocent delight of impromptu song. It is the spirit of L'Allegro that is momentarily evoked, made surer by that aura of "home-felt" joy and innocence that had been so prominent in A Mask. The passage serves to suggest that beneath the verdant richness of its thought this poem too is built upon simplicities which innocence delights to know and share and that here everything depends upon an awareness that all life can have a gracing quality. Everything--for nature and the local deities respond:

Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel,
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,
 And old Damaetas lov'd to hear our song. (34-36)

As Warton said, Milton wrote with the "pencil of a lover" of such joys (Todd, IV:347).

It is at this point in the poem that the poet explicitly links human grief with the break in the harmony of nature:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
 Now thou art gone, and never must return!
 Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,

 And all their echoes mourn. (37-39, 41)

The sense of a personal relationship such as only death could break is made immensely poignant by its comparison with the flowers and the "weanling Herds" that are suddenly overtaken by some power that destroys them:

As killing as the Canker to the Rose,

 Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's ear.
 (45, 49)

There is nothing gentle about this--it is the lash of grief against the heart's own flesh. But it is the "loss to Shepherd's ear" that is pointed to, for it is the harmony their lives made together, the counterpoint of common dedication that death snapped. And in order to suggest the real loss to nature, it is the overgrowing, unattended plants that are mentioned and the echoes of the woods and caves that are made to mourn. For what matters is the disorder and the emptiness of life that comes about when the upholders of harmony are gone. And the one who feels this is the maker of harmony who feels he may be left behind alone. A shepherd, without a fellow shepherd for support. I would think there

is a universal meaning in a passage that expresses so much grief of the living over the loss of a single friend. For all that their devotion stood for, their hours of dedication and of joy, is at issue for all of us in this single death. They had come to know what it meant to be human on an earth so fair, and now just one of them was left to wonder at how much power one has to be human after all.

The next verse paragraph prepares for the first climactic movement of the poem by making as nearly explicit as a poem can or should the universal character and significance of what has happened to Lycidas:

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
(50-51)

Grief forces the poet beyond reason's bounds to rebuke the local deities for carelessness. After all, a Nymph had helped the Lady in her plight. But reason quickly controls the passion grief thrust up. For it is a fond dream to think that even the Muse herself could save her son. No, when it comes to death, all that "universal nature" can do is "lament." The lines on Orpheus' death have the tone of a terrible finality:

When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?
(60-62)

Neither Orpheus, the universal symbol of human harmony, nor nature, however universalized, was ever given so much power of harmony as to be able to stop the fact of death from taking place. This is not because their harmony is not real

but because they have this harmony as a pledge of a grace beyond their own power to fulfill. It was no different for Orpheus or for Lycidas and the created nature and supporting spirits related to them by a bond like that of love than it was for Christ--then even the angels were offered "seas wept from our deep sorrow," because the whole visible and invisible creation could do no more than mourn that circumcision had to be the sign of Christ's own human fidelity. Even "more exceeding love" on earth had submitted to a course of life that led to death. Therefore it is no fault of nature or of those deities closest to her that Lycidas and those like him have died. The bounded power of the nymphs and Muse does not imply that there are two kinds of harmony. What is happening is that the theme of A Mask is being advanced beyond a confrontation by a limited power of evil to that of the final power of evil to destroy. Over this power the local deities have no control. Again as in A Mask, the conception is that of limited and bounded and created lesser powers. As in A Mask also, there is one harmony referred to from beginning to end throughout the poem, and it is the height of that one harmony which the poem touches in its first climax and resolution--a movement which the all but explicit universalizing of the theme prepares for. And it soon becomes evident that it is the Christian convictions supporting the poet's thought that keep drawing his imagination back within the boundaries of the temporal as well as of the eternal realities. The rigorous respect for those

realities makes a major contribution to the strength of the poem's thought.

It is to such realities that the poet now turns. He is nothing if not realistic here. This issue of fame had been fully confronted by Milton in his "Letter to a Friend." It applies here in this poem to Everyman who is a maker of harmony. Why should anyone "scorn delights, and live laborious days" in order to become a maker of harmony if death confronts him as a present possibility every day?

Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?
(67-69)

Shouldn't all singers decide to be the languid or the Bacchic ones which even the Elegia Sexta had all but left behind? All of Milton's settled judgments are on trial here, from that elegy to the Seventh Prolusion and Sonnet 7-- and no doubt some dark influence not unlike Comus would always be waiting on every singer's choice. For death has a way of putting men on trial, and death is really the opposing counsel here.

It is important to see that fame is the ordinary spur which is left with no power to spur once the actuality of death is finally faced. The theme of fame is clearly universalized:

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of Noble mind) (70-71)

Every "clear spirit," each "Noble mind"--it is we who hope to find the guerdon and "think to burst out into sudden blaze." Nothing could be truer to the facts. The poet is

abiding by the realities. That fame is a spur is a universal fact that holds for all mankind. When that spur is taken from them all men are struck by the overwhelming fact of death's imminence and finality. That is why the resolution is immediately personalized. Because each aspiring maker of harmony needs to hear in his first person singular what Phoebus has the power to tell him personally.

But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,

 Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
 And slits the thin-spun life. But not the praise,
 Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;
 (73, 75-77)

It is important to see that Phoebus Apollo, the god who is said to inspire men to song, directly lifts the poet's thoughts to God who is the Maker of all the powers and possibilities of harmony. The Muse, and the Muse's own god, are in the service of a single harmony. It is this thought that makes the poet's ears begin to tremble--that the "pure eyes/ And perfect witness" of God himself watches what the aspiring singer decides to do right here and now.

As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
 Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.
 (84-85)

The central thought is entirely in agreement with that of Jesus in his kingdom parables and his comments on them. But in addition to this, it is important to see that the poet, in his recognition that God looks on him, is touched with awe. The movement of the thought parallels that of the singer of Psalm 73. For the Psalmist it was the presence that he sensed within the sanctuary that restored his troubled mind

to clarity. For the poet in Lycidas it is the awed sense that the inspirer of song himself directs one's thoughts to God that works this change. But the movement of the resolution is very similar:

If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
 I would have been untrue to the generation
 of thy children.
 But when I thought how to understand this,
 it seemed a wearisome task,
 until I went into the sanctuary of God;

 When my soul was embittered,
 when I was pricked in heart,
 I was stupid and ignorant,
 I was like a beast toward thee.
 Nevertheless I am continually with thee;
 thou dost hold my right hand.
 Thou dost guide me with thy counsel,
 and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory.
 Whom have I in heaven but thee?
 And there is nothing upon earth that I desire
 besides thee.
 My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart
 and my portion for ever.

(Ps. 73:15-17, 21-26)

The lines to the "Fountain Arethuse" and the river Mincius are apt transitions from the inspired thoughts of the singer's living relationship to heaven back to thoughts of the universal harmony that in some measure still holds on earth. There is no discontinuity in the thought. In fact, what happens is that the thought of God's watchfulness has made it possible quietly to reaffirm the more familiar if tenuous harmonies that the poet knows to exist on earth. The powers of nature and the sometimes whimsical divinities supporting them are questioned and found innocent of any influence over Lycidas' death.

It was that fatal and perfidious Bark
Built in th'eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

(100-102)

The point is more important than it is usually shown to be. For what is being carefully indicated in this verse paragraph is that nature and the invisible powers related to her would have supported Lycidas in his life's harmony with theirs; but, as in A Mask, some evil power beyond their power to control cast a spell upon the ship and so struck down his life. I am dimly aware that there is more meaning to the "fatal and perfidious Bark" than anyone has indicated. But at least it is clear that the greatest care is taken to make nature "most innocent"--not even the rock which the actual ship struck on is made to figure in the "accident." The blame is placed entirely on the ship as an instrument "rigg'd with curses dark." Perhaps the full significance of the lines is that the power of chaos to bring about such a death is as unfathomable as the fact of evil in the world.

Camus, the river-god of King's locality, proceeds to make it plain that he himself does not know who caused the death of Lycidas: "Ah! Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?" (107). The line expresses this local deity's sense of genuine loss of a fellow-servant (almost a son) of harmony and reminds us that Lycidas has just been referred to as "that sacred head of thine." The references to the river-god as "reverend" and to Lycidas as "sacred" suggest that Lycidas was to Camus a pledge of "heaven's joy." Certainly the references suggest that God had favored both their lives

in their harmonious relationship, and this makes the death of Lycidas a more perplexing one. There is a kind of hush to all these lines that helps to make it clear that in a way that can hardly be talked about a trial of faith is taking place that has finality. Does heaven count when the sudden death of God's own pledge to the powers maintaining harmony on earth occurs? It is a question over which many who have a lesser faith break down. The world has always had its singers of cynicism and despair, and for each of these there must have taken place as quietly as happens in this poem the trial of their faith, that somehow failed. If this is not to happen they must look for inspiration as the poet did to see that in spite of the loss death brings to life, the link of their life's meaning to heaven still holds, and that they still share, however poignantly, in real relationships of earthly harmony. Beyond this, some power from heaven must move into the vision of the individual's life--as it does within the poem at this point.

Peter moves smoothly into the poem with no sense of break in the continuity of the action. His entrance is made parallel to that of "the Herald of the Sea" and "Camus, reverend Sire," for Peter is spoken of as "The Pilot of the Galilean Lake" (109). Nevertheless he comes as a human figure from heaven, with full authority to speak for heaven here:

Two massy Keys he bore of metals twain,
 (The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain).
 He shook his Mitred locks, and stern bespake:
 (110-112)

Nearly all of the relationships involved in the poem are knit in this passage. Peter infers that Lycidas and shepherds like him in their work are all related in a single service for one God. No emphasis is put on this, but it is the tacit understanding here as elsewhere that the true shepherd singer, in his character as in his intended work, is "dear to Heav'n." There does not appear to be any shift in the poet's interpretation of Lycidas' work, first as a poet and later as a priest. To regard the movement of the poem in this way is contrary to all of Milton's own earlier interpretations of a singer's and a learner's and a dedicated individual's life.⁵ At least since the writing of the Nativity Ode, Milton always regarded such lives as having a quality of holiness which was a central element in their capacity to make and uphold harmony. Milton's own single explicit reference to King as a "learned Friend" is sufficient to understand that in the poem Lycidas' relation to Peter and the church comes not from his preparation for the ministry but from his life. In this poem all shepherds bear this relationship to the master Shepherd of them all.

Behind the movement of the thought in Peter's speech is the conviction that it is the church against which "the

⁵ Daiches, esp. 85 & 87, and Tuve, e.g., 75-76 & 85, are conscious of the unity. Some of those who fairly recently have made more of the gradations or movements of increasing Christian significance in the poem are: Brooks and Hardy, esp. 176-177; Allen, 63-64, 68-69; and Barker, "Pattern," 171-172. I agree that there is a movement toward a final climax but am convinced of the single identity of the figures and the thought at each progressive development and resolution. The effect of each movement is to intensify, not change.

"foul contagion spread" and that the "grim Wolf" works with "privy paw," and therefore furtively, indicates that the wolf is the Roman Catholic Church which takes advantage of the ministers' faithlessness. This is borne out by the fact that it is the leaders of the recognized church who make no reply to what the wolf accomplishes. There would be no point in mentioning that there is "nothing said" if they themselves were thought to be the wolf. Laud and his fellow leaders were among the faithless. It is hard to see how they could be the furtive wolf.⁸

Peter then portends the consequences of his authority to bind or loose:

But that two-handed engine at the door
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.
(129-130)

All that needs to be known about these lines is that the "two-handed engine" is the agent of God's wrath that strikes down from heaven those who think their false shepherd's clothes will get them through the door.⁹ I would think that Matthew 25:31-46 gives primary authority to the thought expressed. In that passage the Son of Man accepts those who fed him when he was hungry and helped him in every necessary way because "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." But to those who neglected to

⁸ For a much subtler interpretation, see that of Warton, in Hawkins edition of the poems, IV:153, n. 128.

⁹ See John 10:1-18, on the door of the sheep.

act like this he says: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.... And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Jesus' statement justifies the thought expressed by Peter in the poem. But the mood of the lines is that of Revelation, for it is there that the churches are directly spoken to and the son of man is seen in all his power. What must be kept in mind about the poem at this point is that Peter is speaking with divine authority about earthly shepherds in their temporal duties and the significance that their performance of their temporal duties has upon their eternal life. That is what most of Revelation is all about:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

.....

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast.

.....

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

.....

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:... 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'"

(Rev. 1:4, 12-13, 17-18. 2:1-3, 7)

The technique of the writer of Revelation is to particularize

the invisible realm and yet not make definitive in any final way any figure used to indicate the son of man or those powers that serve him. Just as for Jesus the kingdom of heaven was like a hundred different things, so for the writer of Revelation the son of man and those powers under him have many likenesses. No one likeness encompasses the truth of the natures being talked about. What matters is that this son of man has a terrible power over the consequences of the churches' temporal life:

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:
 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword....
 Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war
 against them with the sword of my mouth....'"
 (Rev. 2:12, 16)

In a similar way the rider of the bright red horse "was permitted to take peace from the earth...and he was given a great sword" (Rev. 6:4). What matters in such references is their power to awe, to make men want to cry out "to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?'" (Rev. 6:16-17). What matters too is to see that all the heavenly powers unite in the necessary work they do, so that it does not matter who it is that wields the engine:

Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.
 (Rev. 14:14-16)

The images are varied to increase the awesome sense of the power which all the images serve to disclose:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords. (Rev. 19:11-16)

And the force of it all is to assert that:

He who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new.... He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev. 21:5, 7-8)

As for Peter in the poem, all this is related to the here and now: "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). Those who do his commandments "enter the city by the gates;" the others are all forced to remain "outside."

Peter in the poem speaks with the same kind of authority that Revelation had, in a strikingly similar way and with the same intent. I would think that this is the originating source of Milton's thought in Peter's speech. Peter's two closing lines have the same character as those figures in Revelation which express the power of the wrath of God to come. The lines were intended to intensify, not to distract.

The power of the lines comes from the fact that we can see no more than that the engine "stands ready," that when it smites once there will be no need for more, and that it is "two-handed" and therefore the engine of some awful heavenly power by which the will of God and of all that serves Him will be carried out. So among other things, Peter's speech becomes a rebuke to all those who are tempted to give up their loyalty because of the temporal deaths of those like Lycidas.

The return to Alpheus and the "Sicilian Muse" and the loveliness of the "Vales" is really made possible by the insights that Peter's words have provided. Not only has his appearance served to strengthen the ordinary shepherd's faith, but he has made it plain that the simplicity of the shepherd singer and his care and song are truer and dearer to heaven and the earthly harmony of which heaven approves than the false ministers, although they may appear to be higher. At the same time, nothing in Peter's speech supports the view that Milton suggests supplanting ministers by poets. For he relates those who are like Lycidas to true ministers. The intent is to recall ministers to their shepherd's task, not take it away from them. The concept of the church and of the "hungry sheep" who do "look up" and "are not fed" is vital to the thought. The development of the thought depends on the conception of the priesthood of all believers, Luther's thoroughly Protestant conception.

The simplicity of Lycidas' shepherd life is analogous to that of the "Heav'n-born child" and the "Virgin blest" in the

Nativity Ode, and the effect is analogous too. In remembrance of him, earth is called upon to be her loveliest, and one remembers that the simple beauties of earth's flowering were dear to Jesus too. Hawkins has noted that "the flowers here selected are either peculiar to mourning, or early flowers, suited to the age of Lycidas" (IV:156, n. 142). Milton calls them "vernal flowers" and "every flower that sad embroidery wears." There is nothing false in the "surmise" of calling upon them any more than of Jesus calling to mind the lillies, except that they cannot "strew the Laureate Hearse where Lycid lies."

Milton is in full control of his imagery. The shepherd who remains on earth, together with nature and the powers closest to her, still deeply feel their loss of the shepherd who has died. But their strengthened faith enables them to express their loss as mourning harmonies. The loss is more deeply sensed than in An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester, but the certainty behind the mourning is the same, as these lines from the Epitaph show:

Here be tears of perfect moan
Wept for thee in Helicon,
And some Flowers and some Bays
For thy Hearse to strew the ways,
Sent thee from the banks of Came,
Devoted to thy virtuous name;
(55-60)

In Lycidas the sense of grievousness becomes like that in Upon a Circumcision, so that the unavoidable suffering and death are incorporated into the consciousness that somehow the relationship of all creation to divinity is still upheld. That is why even the lesser gods who had been banished in the Nativity Ode can be brought back--as in A Mask, now they

willingly serve the eternal purposes that have been revealed to affect men's living here on earth and, indeed, the whole creation as well. Here as always for Milton, at least since the writing of the Nativity Ode, creation, invisible and visible and human too, depends for all it is, can be and does upon some given grace.

The imagery is made to support the Christian realism of the thought. For Lycidas has drowned.

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding
 Seas
 Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd,
(154-155)

In the face of this fact it is only heaven that can help him or the poet in his consciousness of loss. And the power of heaven is believed to have come close enough to earth to help. It is seen as such a power as can "melt with ruth." Behind the thought of the angel Michael is the conviction that there is not only knowledge but feeling in the "Most High" and in those who fulfill his purposes.

The extreme care which Milton has taken to relate the angel Michael to the earth and the water in which Lycidas drowned has been shown by Warton (Todd, III:339-441). The presence of a heavenly power is here and the precise help he gives is his compassion at the loss:

Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth:
 And, O ye Dolphins, waft the hapless youth.
(163-164)

The lines do speak of "the whole crushing human isolation and fragility" (Tuve, 85), but they speak of heaven more. For it is his mounting apperception that heaven is here to

care that lifts the poet's understanding to the gentle sense of triumph that resolves the poem.

The closeness of a power of heaven to earth makes it possible to realize the closeness now of Lycidas to heaven.

Weep no more, woeful Shepherds weep no more,
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor,
(165-167)

The quiet mention that it is a plurality of "Shepherds" who need "weep no more" should not go unnoticed in the reading of these lines. It confirms the poem's universal character, just as the reference to Jesus does. Lycidas is "sunk low" but he is also "mounted high"

Through the dear might of him that walk'd
the waves, (173)

This is a lovely fitting image of the human Jesus and the kind of power he brings. Christ resolves the poet's grief and his perplexity and he does so because of his divine humanity. The thought is entirely consonant with that of the Nativity Ode and is a development of that poem's affirmation.¹⁰

What Allen has written about the last part of the poem

¹⁰To say that Christ and his atonement and resurrection do not matter much for Milton is to go against the facts that poems like Lycidas and the Nativity Ode and Upon the Circumcision, and the "Letter to a Friend" express and upon which many of the other poems rely. Kurth reviews the "New Testament Narratives" in an overly simple but helpful way (see esp. 81-87). While it is not true that the atonement was regarded only as "a satisfaction of Divine Justice," Kurth renders a service to the understanding of Milton (and of Puritanism too) by reminding us that "the Redemption was an act of Divine Mercy with results manifest in the human rather than the celestial realm" (82).

agrees with the way that it impresses me--that it expresses "an actuality of conviction that has never been attained by any other English poet."¹¹ As in Milton's earliest elegies, the poet's thoughts in Lycidas mount up to heaven. But there is an entirely new dimension given here. It is not just that of wonder but of imaged love, and the poet understands this with complete humility. We are given the poignant sense of Christ's own care, shared by the whole of heaven, for one individual. It is "other groves and other streams along," where Lycidas "hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,/ In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love" (176-177). Still song, still shepherd's meekness, joy and love. Heaven is a new earth, a shepherd's home.

There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
(178-181)

In heaven too it is the human fellowship that counts and that Christ by his "dear might" makes possible. Their shared humanity is the height of all the shepherds' harmony and is the final force the poem conveys.¹²

The poet now speaks to Lycidas himself and says that for the shepherds who now "weep no more":

¹¹Allen, 64. Cf. Tuve, 73 & 111.

¹²Miss Tuve's understanding of the poem is similar. See esp. 102.

Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense.... (183-184)

Milton could hardly bring the sense of heaven closer than he does right here. One understands a little better, I think, that for Milton these lesser powers that help upon the earth are the gracing presences given their power by a power from above. Unlike creation, heaven is not bounded in its power to grace. Lycidas becomes a figure like Sabrina, with a power to be good "To all that wander in that perilous flood" (185). The faith which A Mask supported is most clearly reaffirmed, that "in everything God works together for good with those who love him," and that "death shall have no dominion" any more.

The poem closes very quietly by returning to the setting of the earthly shepherd's life. The "uncouth Swain" has been singing "to th'Oaks and rills,"

While the still morn went out with Sandals gray.
(187)

The images are those of the simplicity and purity of nature and of the simple shepherd's relationship to that, as if to remind us that such a life on earth is closest to the life with saints in heaven that has just been imaged for the eyes of our imagination to take hold of. The closing verse paragraph is entirely an implied relationship of the living on earth with Lycidas and those like him above.¹³

¹³ Daiches makes an illuminating contrast between Keats and Milton at this point. He says that Milton's "poem ends by his stepping out of himself, as it were, instead of losing himself in introspection" (92). Daiches interpretation of Lycidas is among the clearest that I have read.

Created nature cooperates to make this relationship of the human with those in heaven more deeply felt by supporting the recovered spirit of contemplative peace. So the morn was "still" and departed with "Sandals gray." The Quills have "tender" stops, and the sun "stretch't out all the hills," and then "was dropt into the Western bay." This second reference to the sinking of the sun, repeated only a few lines after the relationship of this to Lycidas had just been shown, serves to suggest that for those left on earth also the course of each day pertains to what is "dear to heaven"--whether that may seem to sink or rise--and that on earth too no sun sinks with any finality.

There is still much poignancy but there is left only a trace of grief. Grief has given way to the calm heaven brings and the hope heaven gives and the readiness, even the eagerness, to live on earth because of what heaven has done to help men be human in the face of everything. The poet has been singing with "eager thought" and not with "bitter constraint" after all, because instead of only mourning death, as he supposed that he would do at the start, he has been making discoveries that intensify his faith and strengthen life. The response he makes in closing is like that of gratitude:

At last he rose, and twitch't his Mantle blue:
(192)

The movement is the quietest affirmation one can make. As simply as anyone on earth, he "rose." The "Mantle blue" relates him to the purest shepherd's song, and to twitch

that now is to reaffirm his dedication to his shepherd's life:

Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.
(193)

His life is to be an affirmation of intended harmony and earth is to be a place "accepted, hopeful, and dear."¹⁴

Confronted now not with a birth but with a death, Milton in this poem reaffirms the conviction expressed in the Nativity Ode, that since Christ's coming earth knows a beginning "bliss." The insight has been enriched and made warmly personal by the kind of relation seen to hold among men on earth and in heaven above. In seeing this there is much mindfulness--of all the realities--of the first death and the real loss and threat of chaos that this can bring about, but of death's own ultimate futility; of a creation that is graced but in itself powerless against such deaths and yet that does not give up its measure of harmony because of this; and of lives that are troubled but in their trouble feel that they can still know something of a promised harmony. It is the way in which this understanding comes that matters most. For the shepherd figures that control the poem's thought and imagery gain their force by their relation not just to the powers of heaven and earth but to Christ and the kind of fellowship that his "dear might" makes possible. The love of heaven has been given

¹⁴The fine phrase is that of Miss Tuve (106). I have applied it rather differently than she has done.

in a human way and human fellowship is discovered to be the height of harmony, now and always. This recognition is what makes the shepherd's loss a poignant one, but this is also what makes the shepherds' relationship even after death somehow a "happy-making" one. For what the one that "walk'd the waves" makes possible is the living hope that somehow their relationship has not been finally broken, and it is this conviction which enables the shepherd to twitch his mantle and rededicate his life. Harmony has its fulfillment in those personal relationships called love. And in a way somewhat like that expressed in letter 7 to Diodati, what leads to these relationships is the intention and direction of the individual's lives. Everything depends on what an individual decides to relate his own life to, for only some relationships lead to love.¹⁵

The poet in making his decision is "caught up" by faith in a way that goes beyond that expressed in the Nativity Ode. That faith led to a certainty of peace that Christ had brought and made possible a continuing vision of the promised harmony. But in the present poem this faith has become a lived conviction that this harmony somehow holds now for love. We know this because of what the simplest shepherd's life can mean for us. As always, it is shepherds who show us the way and lead to dedication though they may be gone.

¹⁵For those who read the poem today, it is as Robert Beum has said: "Lycidas is a poem that has the force and beauty to change us and in particular to heal us" (325).

The poem thus becomes an affirmation that because we cannot do without the shepherd's song and ministering, any lapse among them is like the drowning of innumerable men. All men are shepherds, and like the shepherd in the poem, we either dedicate our lives or else submit.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CLOSE TO HOME: EPITAPHIUM DAMONIS

Some of the important things to be said about the Epitaphium Damonis have been discussed in the section on friendship as a subject of the early poems.¹ For the poem is a poem of friendship most of all. Hanford notes this and speaks of the poem's "warmth and tenderness."² The poem is an altogether different one than Lycidas and different than anything that Milton had written earlier. The closest parallels to the spirit in which it is written are the earlier letters and elegies to Diodati himself. It is their spirit, the spirit of friendship, passed beyond the grave. What matters here is not death, not the harmonies, not even the question of heaven's power (which is unquestioned, except that grief cannot be quite put down) but Diodati himself and what his loss means to the writer of the poem.

As the loss to Milton was direct, so is the poem. It is direct, personal and intimate, and the tone throughout

¹Pp. 50-52 above.

²Handbook, 136. However, in his earlier study, Hanford made even more of this than I would be inclined to do. He wrote that Milton "substituted consciously and deliberately the principle of friendship" for Platonic love in its romantic form ("Youth", 144). It seems to me (as perhaps the earlier discussion of friendship helps to show) that friendship simply happened for Milton (as it almost always does) and that he came upon some principles that illuminated facts.

is that of one who is confiding what he feels. Nearly everything is missed unless these facts are seen. For the poem is written in the spirit of the shepherds' friendship, and this means that their relationship is central to everything that is said and that great respect is shown for what Diodati was like and what he loved. As I have tried to point out earlier, the passages pertaining to Diodati himself could hardly be made more tender than they are, and it is on the intimacy of their relationship and what the loss of this relationship meant to Milton that the meaning of the poem depends. Everything about the poem is bare and its movement swift. It is a few lines longer than Lycidas, but it does not have that poem's lingering quality. It is nearly barren of the presence of invisible powers or lesser gods. They are not banished but they matter little for the poet's immediate thought. What matters is shepherds in their presence or absence from the earth and their ability or inability to do their work. And it is almost altogether shepherds and their work that is discussed.

To me, almost the most important thing to see about the poem is the swift movement of the thought. To see this helps to make the poem more comprehensible. For the poem's coherence is that of grief trying to find calm. Tillyard is right that the poem is composed of pain, but I think that he over-complicates the cause.³ It is pure grief which the poet is

³Milton, 99-100.

seeking to assuage--that and to some extent remorse that he had left Damon for so long a time. I think that this explains in part why Milton speaks at some length of his Italian trip and future plans. He is trying to show that he was being faithful to his shepherd's art and that he still intends to be. If this is seen, I do not think that the poem appears forced. Milton is troubled, but directly, by the loss of his closest friend ("ut qui plurimum") and by the longing to confide. The act of writing the poem is as much as to say that life was meant for such confiding fellowship. And we the readers are given the tribute to share the shepherd's sorrow and his hope. Masson understands this very well, and his introduction and notes are helpful ones. What he says is true, that it "thrills the nerves of the reader" to hear Milton "speaking his own heart."⁴ We are really taken behind the pastoral scenery in this poem--that is why the imagery is so bare--to where the shepherds who must make our songs sometimes grieve and always must prepare. The Argumentum tells us this is so. And in the poem itself the scene is quickly shown to be plain earth (the same earth that the shepherds share with us), with only their plainest satisfactions and bare thoughts of heaven to brighten it. The "shop-talk" that the poet confides is almost technical, and the frankness of this is intended as a tribute to Diodati and to us. That and the need to talk to calm the grief.⁵

⁴Poetical Works, I:326.

⁵For support of this view see Masson's introduction and notes to the poem: I:317-318, 325 & III:358, n. 155; 361, n. 180.

The movement of the poet's thought is an effort to "immensum sic exonerare dolorem," "to disburden his limitless pain." The repeated refrain makes it poignantly clear that he cannot bring himself to fulfill his shepherd's duties now:

Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni.

Go home unfed, for your master has no time for you,
my lambs. (18)

He says at once that the divine powers cannot help to take away his sense of loss, and as a consequence they scarcely figure in the poem until its close. His thoughts are all on Damon, and it is of Damon and those like him on earth who held him dear that the poet will sing. Damon is sure to be remembered, he says, but this does not take away the loss or make the plainness of the earth more bearable. "Pectora cui credam?" "To whom shall I confide my heart?" he asks. "Solus...solus", "alone...alone" through all of nature, and nature itself untended by him now.

Thyrsis' fellow shepherds call to him. They do not feel the kind of grief he does (others never can), and neither they nor anything on earth can bring him any ease from outside himself--as if to say that any ease must come from something taking place within. It would be easier if he were not a man, he exclaims. For no creatures except man know the feeling that death brings, "aeternum linquens in saecula damnum," "leaving an eternal loss to all the years" (111).

If he had not left his friend for such a long journey, he goes on to say, he might have been there to show the

dying shepherd his deep affection and his faith:

"Ah! certe extremum licuisset tangere dextram,
Et bene compositos placide morientis ocellos,
Et dixisse, 'Vale! nostri memor ibis ad astra.'"

"Ah! had I not gone, surely I might have touched
his right hand at the last and closed his eyes as he
lay peacefully dying, and have said, 'Farewell!
remember me in your flight to the stars.'" (121-123)

But he did go, and he shows that he proved his shepherd's
worth there and found pleasure in that land. And there he
thought of Damon too, imagining him at his work and looking
forward expectantly to the hoped-for time when they could
relax again together and Damon could tell him pleasantries
about his healing arts.

But let those arts go now, he says, for they were no
help. His own art too, which meant so much, seems vain now,
and he himself powerless to go on with it. But shepherds
must go on planning their work, and so he for his part does
have resolves. They are glorious ones and he tells of
them and says that they will all be British themes--for it
is enough for shepherds to be listened to in their home land.
He says that the plans about which he speaks are the ones he
had been keeping to confide to Damon upon his return. These
and the delightful cups that Manso had given him. The cups
especially now, for they show a more exotic earth and the
gods in heaven over it, and the Phoenix too. The images are
rising ones and the sky outspread. "Quis putet?" "Who would
suppose such a thing?" And now, by his talk about his hopes
and what his travels brought him and what is imaged on the
gift that someone who befriended him had given, somehow the

poet's grief becomes resolved and he is led to think that "mentes ardere sacrae, formaeque deorum," "the minds of the elect and the essences of the gods themselves are enkindled." It is the thought of Cupid in the heavens on the cup--a sight that would be dear to Damon--that leads his mind to thoughts of heaven itself. This is enough, because of what the shepherd is, and because of Damon's purity. For only grief has kept the poet's faith from being effectual. There has been no feeling in this poem that Damon's own life is anything but secure.⁶

Milton shows great daring in his thoughts of heaven here, and it is all because of his fidelity to his friend.⁷ For it is a heaven that would be specially dear to Damon, though still a Christian one. Damon's purity and his Bacchic joy are amazingly combined in the poet's vision of him in heaven itself:

Ite procul, lacrymae; purum colit aethera Damon,
Aethera purus habet, pluvium pede reppulit arcum;
Heroumque animas inter, divosque perennes,
Aethereos haurit latices et gaudia potat
Ore Sacro. (203-207)

Be gone, my tears! Damon dwells in the pure aether, the aether which he is pure enough to possess, and his foot spurns the rainbow. Among the souls of heroes and the immortal gods he drinks the draughts of heaven and quaffs its joys with his sacred lips.

⁶ See ll. 23-25, 33-34, 36, 123.

⁷ Masson notes that the lines are "daringly wild" (*Poetical Works*, III:363, n. 198. Warton indicates that ll. 201-219 rely upon the imagery of *Lycidas* (Todd, IV:505).

The elation that the poet feels over this makes it possible for him to feel that Damon (for he will still be thought of as a shepherd here on earth) has the power to help the poet go on with his shepherd's life. But for Diodati himself there will be his own kind of pure heavenly ecstasies:

"Ipse, caput nitidum cinctus rutilante corona,
Laetaque frondentis gestans umbracula palmae,
Aeternum perages immortales hymenaeos,
Cantus ubi, choreisque furit lyra mista beatis,
Festa Sionaeo bacchantur et Orgia Thyrsos."

"Your glorious head shall be bound with a shining crown and with shadowing fronds of joyous palms in your hands you shall enact your part eternally in the immortal marriage where song and the sound of the lyre are mingled in ecstasy with blessed dances, and where the festal orgies rage under the heavenly thyrsus." (215-219)

What controls this vision is not Revelation but the thought of Diodati with his God.⁸ It is a vision as dear as the friendship that the shepherds knew. Damon's life and heaven's life are one. That Milton could look upon God and his friend like this tells more than all our words can say.

⁸Warton refers to Rev. 14:3-4; Todd to Rev. 7:9-10 (Todd, IV:505-506). Masson refers in addition to Rev. 19:5-9 (Poetical Works, III:363).

CHAPTER TWELVE

CONCLUSION

It may be helpful to bring together some of the conclusions that have been reached concerning Milton's thought. The earliest works are remarkable for the sense of wonder and joy which they convey and the openness of spirit which they reveal. Milton is almost always concerned in them with the beginnings and endings of an individual's life and with those relationships which are most epochal for the individual personally. He is caught up by these with a freshness and sensitivity of spirit and responsiveness of mind and heart. And what he seeks increasingly is to make the world's life and the mind's life square.

The Prolusions help to show that for Milton the mind in its adventures must go out and that, in doing so, what matters most is what happens to the mind. The guiding counsel that already seems to control his thought is that the mind must demand an order of all things and that reason is expected to make an art of life. In these Prolusions he shows much spiritedness in defense of truth and much faith in man's capacities, in spite of his recognition that error and corruption and evil are pervasive influences. He believed that men have the opportunity to make life both pleasurable and good.

In his early interests and his convictions regarding these, Milton demonstrated a heightened normalcy and the ability to give rich expression to simple truths so often "mis-called simplicity." His thought was often surprisingly direct and intense, and because he concerned himself with the fundamental issues of men's lives, it was universal in its significance.

With the writing of the Nativity Ode, Milton became quite rigorously faithful to the basic convictions of the Christian faith. The poem relies upon the recognition that in themselves men are corrupt and that nature is not innocent. The poem contrasts the luxuriousness and wantonness of evil with the simplicity and directness of heaven's grace. The coming of that grace in Christ is what the poem affirms as able to make the life of faith a present possibility. The recognition that Christ's coming makes fresh beginnings possible leads to humility. The life of faith begins with worship first of all because of the recognition of how order is restored to life by grace. The fresh beginning of a settled faith first takes the form of an awareness that Christ has brought the power for an individual to experience peace. For Milton himself the strength of these convictions gave his subsequent works a steadied character of unified loyalty. His deepened love of God seemed to make his other loves more liberal and his own thoughts bolder and more original. It was as though his settled faith became a fresh beginning for his thoughts.

As L'Allegro and Il Penseroso convey the sense of pleasure that the mind can know in its relationships, so the Seventh Prologue expresses the power that learning can bestow on life. The poems written at Horton during his subsequent studies show that for Milton this power of learning was a means to make a dedicated art of life. The engagement of the mind with truth is shown by its ardor to be almost a form of love which he believed that God inspires.

These works written during his early years at Horton deal with the challenges confronting man in temporal life. Christ is considered to be the means of triumph and of certainty. Faith is believed to be sustained by a renewal of the mind. The consequence of the changes wrought by Christ and by man's acts of faith is re-established harmony. This harmony is not now a fulfillment but takes the beginning form of temporal likenesses to eternal realities and of the intention and direction of an individual's life. Faith, to be active in the present life, requires a philosophy, since man advances in this life by the freedom of his mind. Milton relied upon and elaborated a philosophy of correspondences between the created world and the divine. He believed that by means of such a philosophy man is able to reaffirm the structure of created nature as supported by God's grace. Although this philosophy was drawn primarily from Plato, it relied upon the thoughts and expressions of other ancient writers, as well as contemporary views. But it was a philosophy that was freshly conceived and capable of continuing development; and it was for Milton as it had been for

Erasmus a "philosophy of Christ."

From the beginning Milton's mind ranged out beyond himself to nature, other men and God. To order what he saw he sought the help that learning can give. But he sought the help of God in doing so, because of his awareness that apart from God the very contributions that the world can make distract and corrupt man in his efforts to gain clarity of mind and force of life. What Milton appeared to be seeking was a concentration of human powers to support and advance a life of harmony. For this he depended on Christ's work, God's continuing grace and the freedom of the mind which a relationship with God makes possible and by which man is able to explore. The mind in its direction of man's temporal life is guided by a "happy-sighted" vision of final blessedness. Man's life becomes a life of faith, of discovering the correspondences of temporal life with heavenly harmonies and of advancing such likenesses on earth with the living expectation that faithfulness to these "pledges" will prepare one for participation in the coming harmony. To this end one's own faculties and all that can be recognized as good, or drawn to be so on earth, must be employed.

Such a dedicated life meets opposition in this world from chaotic powers and, when necessary, must confront such powers in such a way as to prove the reality of its own strength and fidelity. As a consequence, there is immediacy and even urgency to the act of dedication that is made. For in meeting the challenges that can result in faithlessness, an individual is free to choose his course of life. If he

chooses to rely on the insights that Christ's work and consequent grace make possible, the individual will discover that in ways known only by the faithful mind there is throughout creation a re-effected power of harmony that supports him in the free decisions of his mind. The individual discovers that he becomes strong within himself when he lives by his faith in the real measure of re-established harmony, for it is that faith which gives him confidence in the structure of his own life--that and the certainty that God upholds the structure of all that is. An individual who has such faith believes not only in God's power to grace life but in his own graced power and in that of all that was created to be good. It is God's acts of grace that make such beliefs plausible again, so that life is directed to the ends which God has revealed that it should have. To choose that direction is to have the power to resist evil and to share the delights that can be discovered in relation to the good.

It is, therefore, an individual's acts of faith that confirm the belief that creation is intended to be a realm of grace for him. To discover this is to recover a quality of innocence. It is God who in various ways continually intervenes in life to make this possible. To be mindful of the relationship of life with him is to come to have a kind of holiness that finds delight in life and that lives by the expectation of indescribable delights to come. It is a quality of life that makes one feel at home, conscious of the correspondence which this world may have again with

heaven and of the strength given to maintain one's faith against those powers which would deface the self and shatter the fresh beginnings of intended harmony.

The faith and understanding God makes possible gives one the strength to persevere and triumph even in the face of death. For the final threat of chaos which man confronts is not just the temptation to succumb to evil when it presents the "chance." The final threat is not just that one may be subdued but altogether destroyed. Death is the threat that one's own life and all that it upholds is of no lasting consequence. What gives an individual the courage and the insight to go on when confronted by the fact of death is the conviction that life does not end with earth at all. Those who have faith go on with life believing that heaven is a better earth and that they are called upon now to support each other in their faith by the discoveries which they can make to enrich their relationships with one another here and now. They are called to make fresh discoveries of heaven's intended harmony, above all the discovery which each one must make for himself that the harmony men need the most is that of love. It is the recognition of Christ's own "dear might" that enables men of faith to be caught up into relationships of love. The life of faith becomes the making of the harmony called love. That is discovered to be the closest way grace comes to human life and the reason why the intended harmonies hold good. So, as often as necessary, men of faith rededicate their lives

to that or else, however imperceptibly, succumb.

As often as necessary, for the very increase of our human likeness to God's love makes the threats more personally felt. Even more than formerly perhaps, real grief can come, and when it does it sickens faith itself. All that helps the individual then is the remembrance of what made his friendship with the one for whom he grieves so dear. Such remembrance brings with it gradually the perception that he must continue faithful in his life because of what the love they shared was like. The remembrance of this makes it evident that such friendship is itself the closest form of a beginning "bliss" that men can know. The slightest influence may surprise one into thoughts of heaven when the force such friendship had comes back to mind. And as the love was deeply personal, so the thoughts of heaven become more personal too, and heaven is felt to be a place where God befriends those whom we love.

The person who finds his grief resolved in such a way lives now with tempered joy but with more reason to rededicate his life to God's intended harmony. For heaven is looked upon as the fulfillment of a grace he has already known. Such a person feels a fresh need to clarify his faith, a deeper desire to hope and a greater readiness to offer love. All this increases a quiet dedication of the mind and heart and soul and strength and leads to a spirit made more whole within by continuing to reach out in love. What matters is to continue to be human most of all and to continue to have faith that men can grow. What matters is

the certainty that heaven makes life so for those who continue mindful to the end.

As can be seen, Milton came to be deeply moved by the vision of heaven's harmony, but in doing so he did not forsake mankind for God. What he sought to do was to inspire men and women to move into the sphere of heaven's influence and make their earthly lives remarkable on God's behalf. This was his vision and his goal.

The most remarkable thing about Milton, next to his genius, was the assurance of his faith. Nearly all of his works spring from a spirit of equanimity, of certainty undergirding every inquiry, of confidence that God holds ready the resolution of every question and every conflict for the exploring mind. In his fine tribute to Milton, Hazlitt says that Milton's hand was "warm from the touch of the ark of faith."¹ This meant that he was confident that God helps the searcher to inquire.

This faith in the active presence of a living God who works on behalf of every man who seeks His way is at the root of Milton's great sense of freedom. Milton's was a freedom in God, not apart from God; he took it for granted that by definition freedom means shaping life to God's pattern, i.e., working out the destiny God gives you the power and ability to achieve.

¹Lectures, 108. Such faith was not unrelated to Calvinism. Calvin said that "the end of the struggle is always such that faith surmounts these difficulties by which it is besieged, and which seem to imperil it." (Institutes, III.2.18. Quoted in Mackinnon, Calvin, 241). Mackinnon says that Calvin "exalts, inspires, energises" man "by his doctrine of faith."

This fundamental confidence in God and in the character of human life as God created it made Milton an adventurer in faith. It gave him great daring as well as great inspiration for his work. He sought freely from all kinds of sources for means to shape his life and work to the great end he visioned life to have. Homer wrote of a hero seeking wholeness, of Ulysses seeking to recover and fulfill his own identity. Virgil too, and Dante differently, wrote of the hero's quest to find the fulfillment of his being through his mastery of life.² Milton committed himself to make a kind of heroic wholeness his great goal, not merely for himself--this too--but as his contribution to the world: to inspire and guide men to seek the wholeness they should have.

Milton was a Christian and so set Christian goals for human character and its development and expression in this world. We misread Milton's works if we do not recognize that Christian is the modifier of nearly everything he wrote. For Milton, however, Christ encompasses all the world, and so true goals in this world gain from the best that men have ever done, whatever their religious credentials may have been. However, the Christian life, although it is dependent on humility, meant for Milton wrestling against all opposing

² Hughes reminds us that, when Milton read the Odyssey and the Aeneid, "like most Renaissance critics, Milton read those poems as biographies of men in search of perfection" (Minor Poems, 406).

forces in order to maintain personal faith in divine grace as operative and directive in every moment and condition of life. This is the kind of living that Milton sought to find, to foster and to aid.

Milton gave much direction but no formulas for Christian conduct in his works. He was concerned to show how our lives develop when our interest in God and man is made inseparable. But as the works themselves are read one by one, what interests us in Milton's thought is his response to life just as a man, an individual like the rest of us, and not primarily as a theologian or philosopher. Even his excellence as a poet has this quality when the reader himself is caught up by what is said. Poetry is certainly a discipline for Milton, with its own principles and characteristics and intrinsic worth. But it does not serve its own ends merely and is not made to be in itself a way of life.³ Poetry serves to interpret and clarify and convince men of a way of life. In Milton's view poetry appears to be intended to lead to commitments of the mind, with that passionate intensity of response which alters character. For he deals with the realities of the imagination and that imaginative grasp of truth which is itself a kind of experience and so affects our lives. As Hazlitt has said, "Milton had as much of what

³Miss Langdon deals with the point extensively in her study of Milton's theory of art. See, e.g., pp. 2 & 76-77. She says that "it is plain that Milton tested every poetical expression, no matter what its apparent beauties of structure and style, for an underlying beauty of theme and motive." For a profound understanding of how to read religious poetry such as that which Milton wrote, see George Thomas, Poetry, Religion and the Spiritual Life.

is meant by gusto as any poet. He forms the most intense conception of things, and then embodies them by a single stroke of his pen."⁴ The interest which this awakens in the thoughts expressed gives them the power that they have upon our minds.

That power is to move our thoughts continually beyond ourselves. For Milton's views are theocentric, and this determined his response to life. His humanism came to be entirely religious and entirely dependent on a belief in an empowering grace. Milton wrestled with his uncertainties in the same way that so many Old Testament personages did--with the unshakeable conviction that God exists and continues to know us and be near us even when chaos itself threatens to obliterate any knowledge we may have of him.

But somehow it is not the thoughts alone that interest us, for what is unique about them is the dynamic quality which the thoughts themselves are given. There are doctrines in Milton's work and they are important, as I have tried to indicate. But they serve to guide instead of govern the thought. They serve Milton as notations that he makes about reality, and the way in which he presents them conveys the sense that what is important is the relationships that

⁴Lectures, 114-115. Strong has written perceptively of the religious poet's apprehension of truth: "He must see it as beauty, and must be so ravished by the sight that he cannot contain the vision within himself, but must publish it to others" (254-255). As for Milton, Miss Langdon writes that "it is hard to distinguish between Milton's search for the purpose, and his insight into the spirit, of all reality" (5).

one can have with that reality. One feels that Milton believed in God and his intended harmony with such conviction that he would be free to alter his thoughts about them without affecting the foundations of his thought. It is as though he begins not with conceptions but with facts and known relationships, to which conceptions can contribute clarity.⁵ The result was an astonishing humility before the truth, the frequent acceptance of the simplest truths as the most relevant for man. Milton's mature ideas were often common ones, and in view of his manifest intellectual capacities his achievement was all the more wondrous because this was so.⁶ It was as though behind any understanding he might come to stands God's truth.

H. R. Mackintosh has said that "one who looks up into the face of a forgiving God is set within a world of new realities, his personal response to which is the Christian morality" (121). Although Milton went beyond anything that Mackintosh appears to have had in mind, it seems to me that his remark applies to Milton's thought. It is true that, as

⁵ Among the Puritans, John Goodwin was one of those who advanced the view that faith sets men "the task of seeking truth" and advancing it when found (Haller, 200).

⁶ Tillyard's criticism almost always seems to me to recognize this fact. His pamphlet, Milton, presents some simple observations that ought not to be lost from sight: "Milton was a natural Platonist, a natural seeker after perfection by high contemplation, but he also believed with Sidney that the 'ending end of all earthly learning' was 'virtuous action.'" Tillyard notes that in pursuing such aims Milton was "gifted with that ultimate simplicity of mind which Thucydides in his history and Mencius in his aphorisms called that mark of the truly great man..." (7). Milton's early works make it amply evident that he had these aims and marks.

Anglicans so often do, Milton appears to have believed that men are forgiven from the start (or that infant baptism is effectual).⁷ But from the time that he wrote the Nativity Ode, Milton began to develop a truly Protestant ethic of the Christian life. The foundation of this ethic was the concept of grace, which Milton shared not only with Puritans but with many other Protestants as well. Its significance, "stretching before and after," has been finely expressed by L. L. Martz: "But Puritan doctrine insisted that the spiritual life depended entirely on special Grace, accorded the Elect even before the beginning of time" (157). What Milton did was to grasp the positive and creative meaning of such a view of life. He did so with an uncommon, almost unique,

⁷ Cf. Haller, 297. And yet it was the separatist, John Smyth, who said that "the atonement of Christ" was "effectual before Caine and Abells birth" (Works, II:735; quoted in Haller, 205). How deeply the doctrine of universal grace came to affect some Puritan minds can be seen in the posthumous publication of John Eaton's work, Honey-Combe of Free Justification. Haller calls this "besides Everard...the most important statement of early date now extant in print of the doctrine of the general redemption of man" (213). He refers, I think, to Puritan writings. Although it was published after 1642, the similarity in outlook with Milton, especially in A Mask, is remarkable. Here is Haller's summary:

'Now all displeasure, all anger and enmity is utterly abolished from between God and you, and you are set in the compleat love, perfect peace, and full favour of God again.' Believe this, and you will make truth manifest. Satan and the world will rise against you; the great, the learned, the rich and the mighty will condemn you, but your heart will 'laugh and leap for holy joy in God, being voyd of all care and trouble, and be made above measure confident.' Jesus Christ has brought it about that men are born not guilty; he has made it that they may live happily in this world, good flowing from them, and that they may love one another as brothers. (213)

consistency, and I think that he went beyond anything that had been done.⁸ There is in Milton's thought no concept of freedom apart from active grace, and yet there is complete distinction between the two: grace and God, faith and man, inseparable but distinct. The result was a philosophy of grace. There is a clear perception of man's fall from grace, his consequent corruption and dependence on a reconciliation that has taken place. But for Milton the fact of man's redemption begins at once to alter life. He is perhaps even more rigorous than other thinkers in the Reformed tradition in his insistence that the individual experiences the fruits of reconciliation by his increasing knowledge of what has happened to affect his personal life. One can see quite clearly in the development of Milton's thought that regeneration and sanctification take place by means of holding to a vision of what Christ has done and of the consequences that this brings. The need for mindfulness is the prevailing concept in his thought. But in developing this concept of mindfulness, I think he goes beyond what others did in his conception of a structured faith. For Milton was not satisfied to look back upon what Christ had done or forward to the hope of harmony to come. Vision has sometimes been considered to be the major element in Milton's thought, but I do not think that a study of the early works quite bears out this view. For mindfulness involves the application of the vision to life. It appears clear to me that all the

⁸See Appendix B. for a discussion of Milton in relation to Protestant and Puritan thought.

poems written while Milton was at Horton, and the epitaph to Diodati too, have this end in view. They all convey the sense of having been written in the conviction that the individual who is in need can expect to have something like continual revelations given to him personally, sufficient for him to be caught up by the truth he needs to help him resolve the difficulties of his life. That is a Protestant (one might say Reformed) conception of God's grace which has caught fire. That is why it is that to study Milton's thought merely doctrinally would be to miss his most important contribution--the sense of the immediacy of man's relationship with what is true and what this means immediately for his life.

In spite of the richness of expression which they contain, nearly all of the poems which have been studied affirm the fundamental simplicity of the truth and do so in such a way that knowledge is made to be almost a matter of communion. Yet philosophy as such is not regarded in these works as a way of life. Milton applies thought to clarify the choices that determine an individual's way of life. What he always seems to be intent upon is the integration of an individual's character and the strength which the individual can gain in order to meet the various trials of his faith. The last three works considered affirm in different ways that the individual who is loyal to Christ and to his own understanding of what is true will be stronger than the trials he has to face and come to have a freer faith, a more richly human character and a mind that becomes bolder

in its efforts to discover the order and the relationships of life. If this is to be called a life of Christian heroism, it is certainly different than that of a Ulysses or Aeneas, for it is in a quite essential way a heroism of humility, of fidelity to what is considered to be true. I think that the last three works considered show that it would be better to call the Christian life as Milton conceives of it a life of love. For that is the relationship by which the characters in these three poems find sufficient strength and wholeness to go on with life.

In his conception of the way in which the individual's life does go on, Milton affirms the structured power of created good, and always does so, I think, in a way that makes the good of the creation depend upon a power that graces it. For it is misleading (and men have been misled) to talk about Milton's conception of the freedom of the mind as though this is for him a fact unto itself. I would say that for Milton this freedom at every point depends upon God's grace and upon a tremendous faith in life's relationships. It is we who have tended to isolate the mind of man from all with which it might be in relationship. Milton makes relationships imperative--that is the meaning of what might be called his doctrine of intended harmony. He believed that something had happened to make trustworthy again what the mind in its own action can confirm as true about the self and all that with which the self lives in relationship. He affirmed repeatedly in his works that the structure of creation has been re-formed sufficiently to support the life

of love and that this makes a life of such relationships a structured, many-splendored thing, sufficient for the intentions of God's grace to come about. Milton believed that much of creation has a living character, so that the relationships of life become those of participants. (This is his significant difference in emphasis from Hooker--a difference between an emphasis on law that has been given by which to live and a sustaining harmony which all kinds of living creatures can begin to make again). The vital consequence of such a view is that all of life increases the individual's awareness of his relationship with God.

I consider this to be an advance in Protestant thought. It takes away at once what can become a compulsion to think about the self as an almost isolated object of redemption. It gives to thoughts of grace a "home-felt" quality that keeps the individual conscious (and grateful) that he always has relationships with a whole realm to which God's care extends. It does not seem to me to be necessarily an advance to make man depend on his direct relationship with God alone. If God has acted to grace life, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that to some real extent he has made the structure of creation and the self dependable and deserving of a little trust because of the relationship it bears to him. This not only gives a little ease: it does what I think that men require if they are not going to be driven to try to conduct their lives according to some set of rules or to

leave religion almost entirely out of their lives.⁹ It makes the relationships they have to have on earth significant by affirming that it is in these relationships that God's grace is intended to become effectual. Milton has done much to prove that Protestantism can develop a doctrine of a structured faith--of graced creation, not that of natural law but of intended harmony.

The consequences of such a doctrine for the individual are considerable. For it helps him see that "earth's base" is not "built on stubble" and that what he relates himself to and what he does right here have an eternal significance. The person who sees that all of life is intended to be graced will work for that. He will be inclined to trust himself and all he is related to a little more and seek to support and advance life's possibilities. At least that is what Milton affirms that men can do. He makes us feel that our reason has been put in control and challenged to turn all of the relationships of life to good. He would have us affirm the effectiveness of our faith by the way that we live creatively in every confrontation of evil and of good. It is as though in Milton's view of things the individual has been set free to build by the inspiration he continues to receive, even though in doing so he will be poignantly conscious that what he can do here is only graced, not yet fulfilled.

For Milton anyway, the life of faith is lived out in

⁹Haller reminds us that the people were becoming forgetful of religion in Milton's time and that the Puritan preachers proceeded to give them regimens and rules, and "anatomized the spiritual life" (116-117).

the full conviction that God cares and that his care extends to all the relationships one has to have in life. He believed that what Christ has done has graced each individual's life in such a way that he can see the intended harmony that already helps to make a person whole. Creation is regarded as a realm of grace, whose relationships are fraught with "pledges" of a harmony to come. Christ appears to have endeared the good on earth to each man personally, in such a way that by relationships with good one can regain some measure of the childlike quality of innocence. The rich relationships that one can have with men, their arts and learning, and all creation, bow to this--the innocence of faith. By faith the individual discovers in these very relationships some calm and joy and even love, and lives in daily expectation of the fullness of a harmony to come. To live like this is to triumph "over Death, and Chance, and thee O Time." What Williams said with reference to Milton's later works was already true: "The whole of our visibility, metaphysical, psychological, actual, has been increased by him" (xvii). What is also true is that our ability to live by faith has been increased as well.

APPENDIX A

THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

The concept of grace has seldom, if ever, been used with rigorous consistency by any Christian thinker. In any controversies concerning grace and faith and free-will, the New English Dictionary definition generally applies: "The divine influence which operates in men to regenerate and sanctify, to inspire virtuous impulses, and to impart strength to endure trial and temptation."¹ Such a definition obviously has a bearing on the faith of the Lady in A Mask. But beyond this definition numerous Christian writers have also used the term to mean: that which God does to benefit man. More specifically, for the purposes of the present study, this benefit is construed as being bestowed by God throughout creation, as it were, simultaneously. What is really involved here is a concept of divine immanence as contrasted to a purely transcendent concept of God's relationship with his creation. This contrast has been popularly viewed as a contrast between a Platonic and Augustinian and Protestant assertion of the divine immanence on the one hand as opposed to the Aristotelean and Thomistic and Roman Catholic assertion of the two-storied relationship of God and his creation on the

¹Quoted by Williams, 1.

other. Although this appears to be a very great oversimplification of the facts, the distinction itself is real enough and of great consequence. For grace, to be effective, must be the operative power of God upon his creation.

The term was always applied, directly or indirectly, to benefits made possible by Christ. But from an early time these benefits were believed to be inclusive ones. Williams says that "the basic meaning...of the term 'Grace' which St. Paul found in existence is that of God's favour or kindness towards man, or certain men" (10). And Manson writes that "grace for St. Paul signifies the generous love or gift of God by which in Christ salvation is bestowed on man and a new world of blessings opened."² Although I am not sure that Manson intends the phrase to be taken literally, I am quite confident that for Milton Christians did have open for them a "new world" of grace. Manson concludes that in the New Testament grace is "undifferentiated, as being the entire presupposition of the Christian life, from which everything in that life flows, and by which everything in that life is inspired" (60).

From this it was a short step (if a step at all) to the early Greek view that "everything in creation, providence and redemption, accomplished by the triune God, through His good Will, is a manifestation of Grace."³ Such a view is

²W. T. Whitley, ed., The Doctrine of Grace, 43.

³From the "Report of the Theological Committee...of the Faith and Order Movement," in Whitley, 6. Cf. 74ff.

apt to encourage a belief in free-will, as it did in Irenaeus, and it is because of his attack against the Pelagians on this point that Augustine's concept of grace is often thought of as limited to the issue of grace versus free-will. But Augustine had a considerable conception of God's universal Providence (which others earlier had taken to be a form of grace), and even with specific reference to the individual, Augustine thought of grace as "bestowed immediately upon the soul by God through interior illumination or by the providential operation of circumstance."⁴ The point should not be missed, for Milton's views in A Mask are closely aligned with Williams' interpretation of Augustine here: "God gently leads the elect to desire and pursue goodness by presenting the idea of virtue to them under the most beautiful and seductive guise, and by revealing Himself in some measure, albeit imperfect, of His eternal loveliness and glory" (33).

Although I do not think that the influence of Irenaeus and John Scotus Eriugena can be shown to be decisive upon Milton himself with reference to the subject of grace, they were clearly influential in the thought of Hooker, and as will be shown, Hooker's thought was in part at least analogous to that of Milton. Eriugena developed Irenaeus' concept of man's possible "recapitulation" of Christ's deity in such a way that grace became "the complement of Nature."⁵

⁴Williams, 33.

⁵Frank Gavin, in Whitley, 137.

Gavin says of Eriugena that "operating within the cycle of the thought of St. Irenaeus he regards the Incarnation as the full flowering of the eternal purpose of the Father, by which the highest of creation would be enabled through fellowship with Him to be ennobled beyond Nature into a state that can only be called deification."⁶ I do not think that Milton went so far. His sources can be shown to be fundamentally Protestant. Among the Reformers it is Zwingli who uses the term most commonly in a multiplicity of senses, from creation as being "out of the goodness and Grace of God" to the new birth itself. Milton certainly depends upon a concept close to that of Zwingli when he says: "let him see that for himself there remains with his Creator and Father Grace so certain and ready that he can by no means be torn away from him on whose Grace he leans."⁷ For Milton as for Zwingli, grace and faith are inseparable acts of God and man together.

But I think Calvin's view is closest to that of Milton on this point. It must be admitted, however, that the term grace is used more freely by Choisy, whose interpretation I follow here, than by Calvin himself. Nevertheless, I think that the interpretation is correct. Choisy defines Calvin's conception of grace as "the Sovereignty of God manifesting itself in the World, or:--The Sovereignty of God in the Service of His Love." This grace is given as general grace

⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁷ Zwingli, Latin Works, 3. 668. Quoted in Whitley, 221.

to all men and special grace to some. As a consequence, "everywhere, good comes from God and His Grace." But by his special grace God creates in men "a new spirit, a new heart." Men are thereby regenerated in their nature and given "the gift of perseverance." Thereby, "without being constrained, but in virtue of the inevitable consequences of their state of Grace, they spontaneously do good. They persevere in good. They possess the liberty of good."⁸

One must not suppose, however, that Milton adopted Calvin's view without adapting it. After all, Milton was not only independent in his thought but a member of the Church of England at this time, and it was as true then as now that "as regards the Anglican Communion, it must be stated to begin with that no generalisations are ever quite true."⁹ I suspect that it was his Anglican origins that originally made Milton feel so free to adapt different viewpoints into a consistent view which he could accept.

I have tried to incorporate Milton's own view on grace in the discussion of A Mask. It remains to be noted, however, that Milton's views are not necessarily divergent from those of Hooker, since Hooker is very liberal in his interpretation of the way in which the laws of nature work. It would seem to me that Milton, perhaps because he is less precise, is able to be more consistent or at least less ambiguous than Hooker, but that the two views have much in

⁸ Eugene Choisy, in Whitley, 228-232.

⁹ "Report of the Theological Committee," Whitley, 12.

common at several points. The following quotations contain some of Hooker's phraseology that would appear to be closest in thought to that which Milton held.

Who the guide of nature, but only the God of nature?
 "In him we live, move, and are." Those things which nature is said to do, are by divine art performed, using nature as an instrument; nor is there any such art or knowledge divine in nature herself working, but in the Guide of nature's work.

.....
 ...the natural generation and process of all things receiveth order of proceeding from the settled stability of divine understanding. This appointeth unto them their kinds of working; the disposition whereof in the purity of God's own knowledge and will is rightly termed by the name of Providence.... That law, the performance whereof we behold in things natural, is as it were an authenticall or an original draught written in the bosom of God himself; whose Spirit being to execute the same useth every particular nature, every mere natural agent, only as an instrument created at the beginning, and ever since the beginning used, to work his own will and pleasure withal. Nature therefore is nothing else but God's instrument....

.....
 ...the Mirror of human wisdom plainly teaching, that God moveth angels, even as that thing doth stir man's heart, which is thereunto presented amiable. Angelical actions may therefore be reduced unto these three general kinds: first, most delectable love arising from the visible apprehension of the purity, glory, and beauty of God, invisible saving only unto spirits that are pure: secondly, adoration grounded upon the evidence of the greatness of God, on whom they see how all things depend; thirdly, imitation, bred by the presence of his exemplary goodness, who ceaseth not before them daily to fill heaven and earth with the rich treasures of most free and undeserved grace.

.....
 Goodness is seen with the eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye, is reason.

.....
 The object of Appetite is whatsoever sensible good may be wished for; the object of Will is that good which Reason doth lead us to seek.... Finally, Appetite is the Will's solicitor, and the Will is Appetite's controller; what we covet according to the one by the other we often reject; neither is any other desire termed properly Will, but that where Reason and Understanding, or the show of Reason, prescribeth the thing desired.

Where understanding therefore needeth, in those things Reason is the director of man's Will by discovering in action what is good. For the Laws of well-doing are the dictates of right Reason.... there is that light of Reason, whereby good may be known from evil, and which discovering the same rightly is termed right.

.....
For there was never sin committed, wherein a less good was not preferred before a greater, and that wilfully; which cannot be done without the singular disgrace of Nature, and the utter disturbance of that divine order, whereby the preeminence of chiefest acceptation is by the best things worthily challenged.

.....
The general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God himself. For that which all men have at all times learned, Nature herself must needs have taught; and God being the author of Nature, her voice is but his instrument. By her from Him we receive whatsoever in such sort we learn.

.....
A law therefore generally taken, is a directive rule unto goodness of operation. The rule of divine operations outward, is the definitive appointment of God's own wisdom set down within himself....

.....
Wherefore that here we may briefly end: of Law there can be no less acknowledged, than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world; all things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power, both Angels and men and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent, admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy. (I. iii.4 to viii.4; xvi.8. Vol. I:156-173, 228).

Although there is in Hooker a somewhat bewildering facility to encompass Platonic and Aristotelean principles almost in alternate sentences, these passages, and many more like them, show that Hooker's views were similar to Milton's at some important points. I would add to these an important passage in Hooker on the virtues of faith, hope and charity, which, he says, "have not in nature any cause from which they flow, but were...ordained besides the course of nature, to rectify

nature's obliquity withal" (I. xii.1. Vol. I:206).

But it would be a mistake to conclude that Milton was greatly influenced by Hooker in his thought. Hooker was much more "judicious" in his thinking than Milton was and had a greater regard for law within itself. For Milton the controlling concept was clearly that of harmony, and it was "more exceeding love" that moved creation in some way with a renewed harmony and that gave men the light of expectation by which they could live. Milton's thought was more directly influenced than Hooker's by the concept of God's special grace as re-effecting a living relationship of man and all creation with a living God. He spoke far more than Hooker in terms connoting a beginning "bliss".

In conclusion, the very ample definition of grace given by the Theological Committee of the Faith and Order Movement would appear to me to be very close to Milton's view:

We agree that Divine Grace as revealed in Jesus Christ means the loving kindness of God shown to man in our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, and especially in our redemption.... We agree...that God is moved to His gracious activity towards man by no merit on man's part, but solely by His free, out-going Love.¹⁰

¹⁰Whitley, 24-25.

APPENDIX B

MILTON AND PROTESTANT AND PURITAN THOUGHT

Milton's views appear to me to be broader in scope, richer in substance and more consistent than other Protestant interpretations of the consequences of grace. Among the Puritans in particular, I have been unable to determine any marked influences upon Milton except in a most general way. Martz suggests some of the reasons why Puritans, in some ways like evangelical Protestants today, tended to rely on the Spirit to "provide its own Method" of operation" (156ff.) Milton shared with other Puritans the conviction that redemption leads to immediate consequences of regeneration in the individual's life. For example, Richard Sibbes said that "the grace of God is a blessed Alchemist, where it toucheth it makes good, and religious."¹ However, I cannot conclude from the present study of Milton's early works that his primary influences were those of what Haller calls "the Puritan saga of the spiritual life," the vivid depiction of "the life of the spirit as pilgrimage and battle" (142). Milton found more that was "home-like" in the world than many other Puritans did. See, e.g., Thomas Taylor, "graduate of Cambridge, fellow of Christ's College," of whose

¹A Learned Commentary, p. 257. Quoted in Haller, 125. Cf. Haller, 123-126 on the Puritan conception of the uses of this world.

work Haller writes: "The Christian, knowing that he is only a stranger and eager to be at home, takes no delight in his journey" (149). Haller can also say of the Puritan saga that it "did not cherish the memory of Christ in the manger or on the cross" and that its "mystic passion was the crucifixion of the new man by the old..." (151). These are significant differences in emphasis from Milton's own. They can and did lead to a preoccupation with the self, an anatomization of the soul and an acute sense of the dichotomy of life. One cannot speak of the characters in Milton's poems as has been done of Bunyan's Christian, that he was "morbidly fearful of his own guilt," and that "the preoccupation with good and evil, with moral slavery and moral deliverance...has produced in him anxiety, unrelieved by faith...."²

What Milton shared with other Puritans was the conviction that men are "actors in a universal drama."³ But he shared this with the Greeks since Homer and with the Old Testament writers as well. He gained from such ancient sources, and from those of later times, a richness and a range--a universality--to his thought which was not the dominant quality of the Puritan saga. Perhaps it was because Milton objectified the power of sin, as John Knox has noted that Paul himself had done, that he was not driven to

²Frye, 108 & 114. See Wakefield, 128, however, for the suggestion that this was not entirely typical.

³Haller, 142.

a militant self-preoccupation and anatomization of the soul.⁴

On the other hand, Milton was more consistently realistic than the Puritan mystics. Among them there was always a tendency to interpret the individual's relationship with Christ in the way that Wakefield points out that Walter Marshal did near the close of the century: "'Christ liveth in me' does not mean that the individual is animated by some grace that Christ has wrought, but that he has become one flesh with Christ" (34). The evidence of Milton's early works indicates that Milton did not follow John Everard (who translated the Theologia Germanica in 1628) and other Puritan mystics in such views. "We belong to the vast Ocean," Everard wrote of man.⁵ Milton's concept of the activity of the soul in its relationship with the divine was rational, not mystical. In this he partly followed the reformers as well as Augustine and Plato, who had a direct influence on his thought.

At no point in this study has it proved necessary to interpret Milton's thought as being determined by Neoplatonism. He accepted the popular "world picture" of visible and

⁴Christ the Lord, 112. See also Aulen, 36, for Irenaeus' influential view of sin, death and the devil as objective powers to which man is in bondage.

⁵Gospel Treasure, 753. Quoted in Jones, 249. See Haller, 206-216, for a review of Puritan mysticism. See also Wakefield's conclusions on Puritan mysticism, in which he says that typically "neo-Platonic associations are subordinate" (108). See also White, who says of Puritan devotional literature (1600-1640) that "the majority of the writers of these books are neither philosophers nor mystics" (189ff.).

invisible correspondences, and this was affected by the inheritance of Neoplatonism; but his use of this is distinctively Platonic, as I have tried to indicate. His thought does not exhibit some of the dominant characteristics which belonged to sixteenth and seventeenth century Neoplatonism. There are only two or three passages in the early works that might be interpreted mystically, and these are readily interpreted in ways consistent with his other expressions. Nor is there any merging of the finite with the infinite in his thought. My conclusion on this point from a study of the early works accords with that of Curry in his study of the later works: "Milton does not himself intuit God in the mystic union of the human intelligence with the superintellectual principle, as Plotinus and others do" (22). He had a vibrant sense of the effect of truth upon the knower, as Plato did, but it is that of passionate thought, not mystical union. Although Harrison fails to convey the ardor of Milton's thought, the contrast which he notes between Spenser and Milton is real: "About Spenser beauty lies as a golden splendour streaming from the hidden world of the moral nature; whenever it shines upon the lover's sight, it at once moves him to silent adoration. In Milton, on the other hand, beauty is an idea to be known in the soul by him who seeks for it among the beautiful objects of the world of sense; its pursuit is an intellectual quest of a philosophic mind" (41).

The essential distinction is that which Pauck applies so brilliantly to Calvin in contrast to the mystics and which

he suggests has universal application:

The interpretations of this commitment of man to God have always been, generally speaking, of two kinds. One either tried to explain how the soul could rise to God--then the religious life was seen as an interpretation of human existence in so far as it is governed by its own deepest levels. Or one attempted to show that the knowledge of God is the pre-supposition of the best self-knowledge at which man can arrive--then religion was seen as the service of God. The first way of speaking of religion is characteristic especially of the mystics; the second way may be called that of the prophets. The mystics begin with human experience and then cause their mind to be elevated in the search for the vision of God, but the prophetic way of speaking of religion is one in which human existence, and particularly human self-knowledge, is understood in the light of the divine self-disclosure. When religion is thus interpreted, God-knowledge becomes the basis of self-knowledge. (60)

Knowledge governing experience, and knowledge of God disclosing the truth about personal life--this was profoundly Milton's view, if by this is meant that such knowledge supports the individual in actual relationships.

There is no convincing evidence in Milton's works of anything other than parallels with the seventeenth century Platonists at various points. He appears to have been working independently of them with the aid of some sources common to them all.⁶ They shared with Milton the awareness that theologies and philosophies point to "spiritual facts lying at its basis" and that they serve to coordinate these facts.⁷ Willey suggests the significance of their confidence "in the

⁶Cragg's excellent study really suggests this. See esp. 37-59.

⁷Tulloch, Rational Theology, II:462.

reality of the mind's images," but recognizes that they did not develop a consistent theory of the imagination (161-162). They shared with Milton too the conviction that religion is "a higher, purer, nobler expression of the ordinary life" and that "faith and reason--the divine and the human--grace and works--" are "inextricably involved," as Tulloch writes of them (II:467 & 470). But, as Tulloch so justly indicates, they lacked the clarity and force of expression and the ability to organize their thoughts which Milton had to a high degree (II:476). There is much evidence in their writings, in fact, of inconsistency and even confusion of thought. They did not maintain a clear distinction between the human spirit and the divine, and this was so because, as Willey says, for them "the righteous are to become, in this life, partakers of the divine nature" (143). Their trouble was either "their lack of critical and historical judgment," as Tulloch suggests, or a simple preference for Neoplatonism over Platonism (II:478). On this point Tulloch's conclusion is that of Coleridge: "They are, as Coleridge says, Plotinists rather than Platonists" (II:478-479). As a consequence, their spirit differs from Milton's in much the way that Tulloch says that it differs from "the genuine Platonic spirit--the one clear, bright, poetic, dramatic, scientific rather than mystical; the other vague, serious, and exclusively theological" (II:480).

Whichcote, however, of whom Tulloch says that "in a true sense he may be said to have founded the new school of philosophical theology," (II:45) does not appear to have

been as strongly influenced by Neoplatonism. Tulloch gives a digest of quotations from his works (II:99-116). He shows what Puritan thought was capable of in views that parallel some of Milton's most important convictions. Jones says that "the central idea in Whichcote's teaching, which runs like a gulf-stream through all his writings, is his absolute certainty that there is something in the 'very make of man' which links the human spirit to the Divine Spirit and which thus makes it as natural for man to be religious as it is for him to seek food for his body.... Religion is thus thought of as the normal way of life, as the true fulfilment of human nature and as complete inward health. 'Holiness,' he says, 'is our right constitution and temper, our inward health and strength.'... 'We naturalize ourselves,' to use his striking phrase, 'to the employment of eternity.'" (296-298, 301).

I have suggested in the present study that the cardinal English influences on Milton were those of the schoolmasters and the poets who preceded him. Beyond this, about all that I can conclude on this subject at the present time was that Milton's outlook was influenced by that of Puritans such as his early tutor, Thomas Young, and no doubt by his Cambridge teachers as well, but that his interests were broader and deeper than those of other Puritans of his time. There is some similarity in temperament between Peter Sterry and Milton.⁸ But it can be said with even more assurance, I

⁸ See Davies, Free Churches, 114-115.

believe, that Milton's spirit was not unlike that of Lucius Carey, Lord Falkland, who shared many similarities of temperament with Milton. Tulloch stresses his importance as the leader of the moderating group of rational thinkers (I:76-169). Both men went back to primary sources to help them shape their thoughts. The importance of this in the development of Milton's thought must never be underestimated. It does not explain the consistency of Milton's views but it accounts for their comprehensiveness and his independence from any specific contemporary Puritan influences.

Probably the strongest influences upon Milton's thought were those of the Bible, Plato, Cicero, Augustine, Zwingli and Calvin, along with the mythology and imagery and poetic expression of Greek, Roman, Italian and English writers too numerous to mention. With their help and that of many others, Milton was engaged from an early age in rethinking the Reformed Protestant tradition for himself. This does not mean that he was without Protestant influences from beyond the Reformed tradition, any more than Calvin was. Pauck reminds us that Calvin himself "showed himself in all respects a true disciple of the early Reformers, especially Luther. The doctrine of justification by faith...was adopted by Calvin as his major theme" (57-58).⁹

⁹ Cf. Davies, Free Churches, 13ff., who gives three basic doctrines held by them in common. See also Pauck's profound understanding of the Protestant idea of revelation: "No liturgical or ecclesiastical or theological form of this idea of revelation can be final" (142-144). It was the 16th century humanists and reformers who recognized this, he points out (145).

Haller gives an account of likely Puritan influences upon Milton in his youth (288-296). Haller's book is a major study of the Puritan background to 1640. Some of my conclusions concerning Milton's own thought differ markedly from those of Haller, however. His evaluation of Milton's views on the atonement and redemption (313), although popular, does not appear to me to be borne out by a study of Milton's early works themselves. It also seems to me that so many influences beyond those of Puritanism were affecting the development of Milton's thought that it is not accurate to say that he exemplified the intellectual Puritanism of his day, unless the meaning of the word Puritan is broadened to the point where there is no distinctive meaning left. The facts appear to bear out Tulloch's statement that "Milton was certainly a great deal more than a Puritan."¹⁰ It seems to me that the more liberal interpretation which Haller gives of the intellectual orientation of the Puritan political leaders applies to Milton too (330-331). As Haller so very nearly says of Milton, "Protestant evangelicism, humanistic faith....--the two became completely one in this poet...." (317). That statement, if left unqualified, seems to me encompassing and accurate.¹¹

¹⁰ English Puritanism, 167.

¹¹ Smithen, 245-247, concludes that the Anglicans themselves were "fundamentally 'evangelical' and 'Protestant,' though not slavish imitators of the continental Reformers," and it must be re-emphasized that Milton's outlook was decisively influenced by his English religious-humanist heritage.

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